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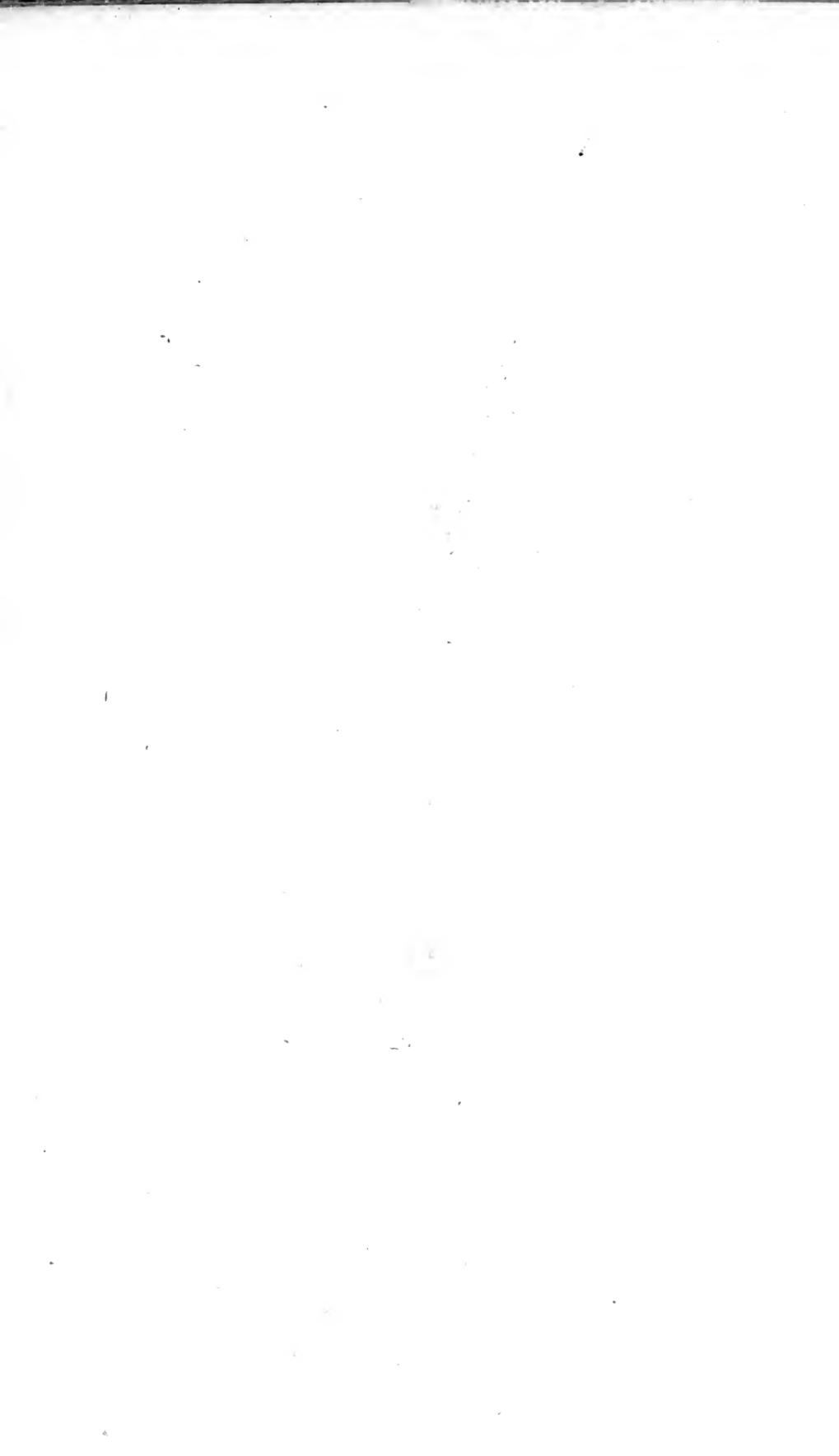
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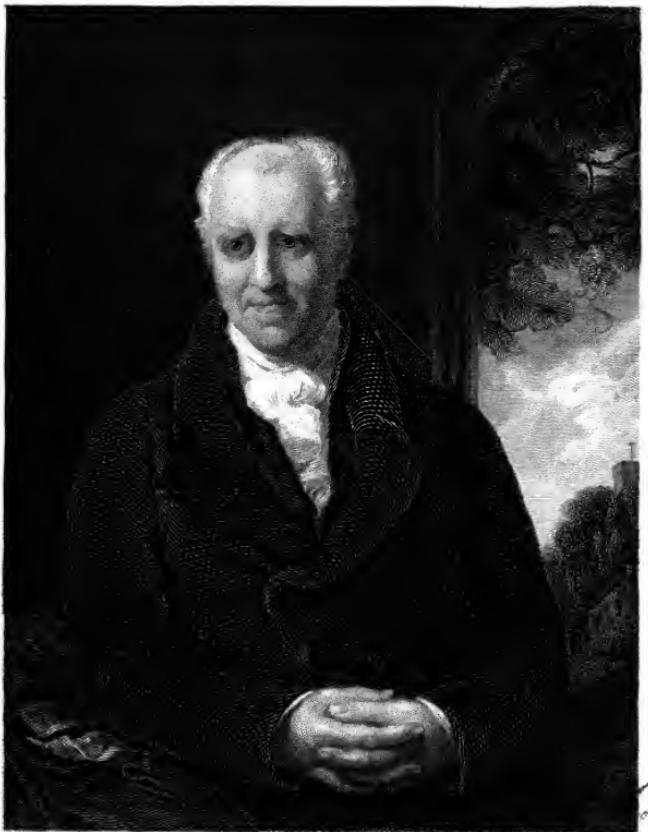
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TO

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May it please your Royal Highness.

It was usual in olden times, when a work was dedicated to a noble patron, to acknowledge the favour in a dedicatory epistle ; and though of late this ancient custom has fallen into disuse, I hope it may not be deemed out of place or presumptuous in me to return to it, more especially as it affords a happy opportunity of gratefully and humbly acknowledging (which it were ingratitude in me to omit) the gracious condescension of your Royal Highness in accepting the dedication of the present volume. While thus conferring a distinguished favour, your Royal Highness will, I believe, be gratifying the first and noblest wish of your heart by promoting the cause of divine truth,—a cause which you feel it to be no less your happiness than your privilege to maintain, and the

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advancement of which shieds a lustre on the exalted position you occupy and adorn.

When I applied to your Royal Highness for permission to place this volume under your Royal patronage, I was urged to so bold a step, not only by the necessities of so large and growing a charge as that of the important manufacturing town of Trowbridge pressing upon me as its Minister, but under the firm persuasion, that by your Royal Highness's condescension, the general interest of the Church in this locality would be greatly advanced.

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secured to it by the countenance of such a Patron, a favourable and respectful reception from all. That the God of princes may be pleased to protect our gracious and beloved Queen, and you, her Royal Consort, and perfect grace in each, and give you as much favour in heaven as you have honour on earth, is the earnest prayer of

Your Royal Highness's

Very humble

and obedient Servant,

JOHN D. HASTINGS.

*Rectory, Trowbridge,
May, 1850.*

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P R E F A C E.

IT is the generally received opinion, as well as that entertained by the most competent judges, that the Author of the Sermons contained in the present volume, the Rev. George Crabbe, ranks amongst the most distinguished of our British poets ; his knowledge of human nature, which he made his constant study, was deep and penetrating : and by the keen and powerful research of his ever active and enlightened mind, he traced the various conduct of mankind to its real and hidden spring, and, stripping their actions of all artificial guise, brought them out into the light of truth ; thus excelling in delineation of character, he is accurately described as

“ Nature’s sternest painter, yet her best.”

The following graphic sketch from a little work lately published, entitled, “ PINACOTHECÆ HISTORICÆ SPECIMEN,” is highly characteristic :—

“ GEORGIVS . CRABBE,
mire . opifex
plebecvlæ . mores . ac . fortvnas
natvrae . veriqve . coloribvs
describere
idem
in reserandis . abditissimis . affectvvm . fontibvs
miserationis . præcipve
potentissimvs
Omnibvs . omnivm . svffragiis . dignvs
qvi . novæ . in . re . poetica . disciplinæ
avctor . haberetvr.”

But although known and valued as a poet, Mr. Crabbe, as a preacher, was unknown, except to a comparative few; yet undoubtedly the distinguished talents and rare attainments which have secured to him such well-earned reputation as an author, entitle him to more than ordinary attention as a preacher of the everlasting Gospel. If his acute observation could so well decipher character, if he could investigate and understand the workings of vice and passion in the human breast, before they break out into action, could detect the first steps in evil, or discover the feeblest effort of the wanderer to return to the paths of piety and virtue ; if his ear was ever open to the tale of woe, and his heart ever ready to feel for others;—then was he peculiarly suited to warn the sinner, to bear the sweet message of mercy to the penitent, to admonish the unwary, to instruct the ignorant,

and to comfort the afflicted under the many sorrows and sufferings which are the sad consequences of the first transgression of man.

Before the entrance of our Author into the ministry, his own pen bears testimony to the clear and scriptural knowledge which he possessed of the all-important and leading doctrines of Christianity, of the state of man by nature as a sinner, and of the only way by which pardon of sin and holiness can be obtained, even through the sacrifice of Christ's atonement. In his life, p. 86, there are some beautiful meditations which exhibit so strikingly the practical influence of the faith he professed on his character and feelings, that the Editor is induced to lay before his readers a portion of them, and trusts he may be pardoned for so doing.

I.

“ Amid the errors of the best, how shall my soul find safety ? Even by thee, O Lord ? Where is unlettered hope to cast her anchor ? Even in thy blessed Gospel ! Serious examination, deep humility, earnest prayer, will obtain certainty.

“ God is good. Christ is our only Mediator and Advocate. He suffered for our sins : by his stripes we are healed. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all are made alive. Whoso believeth shall be saved. But faith without works is dead. Yet it is the grace of God that worketh in us. Every good and every perfect work cometh from above. Man can do nothing of

himself; but Christ is all in all; and whatsoever things ye shall ask in the name of Jesus shall be granted. This is sufficient, this is plain; I ask no philosophic researches, no learned definitions; I want not to dispute, but to be saved. Lord! save me, or I perish. I only know my own vileness; I only know thy sufficiency; these are enough; witness heaven and earth my trust is in God's mercy, through Jesus Christ, my blessed Redeemer. Amen."

II.

"O, my Lord God, I will plead my cause before thee, let me not be condemned; behold, I desire to be thine, O, cast me not away from thee. My sins are great, and often repeated. They are a burthen to me, I sink under them; Lord, save me, or I perish. Hold out thine hand; my faith trembles; Lord save me, ere I sink.

"I am afflicted in mind, in body, in estate; oh! be thou my refuge! I look unto thee for help, from whence all help cometh. I cast off all dependence on the world, or mine own endeavours: thou art my God, and I will trust in thee alone.

"O Lord, Jesus Christ, who didst deliver us from darkness and the shadow of death, illuminate, enlighten me; comfort me, O Lord, for I go mourning. O be thou with me, and I shall live. Behold, I trust in thee; Lord, forsake me not. Amen."

III.

"I look back on myself,—myself, an ample field of speculation for me. I see there the infant, the child, and all the rapid progress of human life; the swifter

progress of sin and folly that came with every new day, but did not, like the day, depart to return no more.

“ If I die to-morrow—and it may be my lot—shall I not have cause to wish my death had happened at a former period ? at a time when I felt strong hope and lively faith ? And what inference will the wish lead me to draw,—a wish for stronger hope and livelier faith, an ardent prayer and due repentance ? If not, my wishes will be my torment. Never again to be cheered with the comforts of divine grace, how sad ! to be totally forsaken of it, how tremendous !

“ But I speak of to-morrow, why may it not be to-day ?—why not now ?—this instant, I ask my heart the question, it may cease to beat. The thunderbolt may be spent on my head. The thunderbolt, did I say ? O the importance of a worm’s destruction ! A little artery may burst ; a small vital chord drop its office ; an invisible organ grow dormant in the brain, and all is over—all over with the clay, and with the immortal all to come.

“ Of the ten thousand vital vessels, the minute, intricate network of tender-framed machinery, how long have they wrought without destroying the machine ! How many parts necessary to being, how long put in motion ! Our hours are miracles : shall we say that miracles cease, when, by being, we are marvellous ? No, I should not think the summons wonderful ; nor partial, for younger have been summoned ; nor cruel, for I have abused mercy ; nor tyrannical, for I am a creature, a vessel in the hands of the potter : neither am I without conviction that, if it be better for me to live another day, I shall not die this.

" But what of awe, of fear, in such a call ? Where is he who *then* thinks not—if he has permission to think—solemnly ? God his judge, and God his redeemer ; terror visible, and mercy slighted, are then to be heard :—the moment at hand that brings heaven or hell ! Where is an opiate for the soul that wakes *then* ?

" O thou blessed Lord, who openedst the gate of life, let me live in true faith, in holy hope : and let not my end surprise me ! Ten thousand thoughts disturb my soul : be, thou greatest and fairest among ten thousand,—be thou with me, O my Saviour ! Return ! return ! and bring me hope ! ”

In this volume there are twenty-one sermons, which are now for the first time presented to the christian public. It must be distinctly borne in mind by the reader, that they were intended solely for the parochial charge over which Mr. Crabbe was placed ; they were written, not to please the ear, nor to satisfy curiosity, but to instruct the understanding and influence the heart.

The Editor would simply state the cause of their appearance. Trowbridge is a manufacturing town with an increasing population, at present amounting to about 14,000 ; the poor are very numerous, chiefly engaged in the woollen manufacture. In the year 1845 schools were built for 750 children ; on their completion they were licensed by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese for divine service, during the rebuilding of the parish

church, which was unsafe to assemble in, and therefore was required to be taken down, with the exception of the tower and a small portion of the outside walls. The united cost of church and schools, including site for the latter, and residences for teachers, was 10,000*l.*; but notwithstanding that the greatest exertions have been made, there yet remains a very heavy debt. In order to raise the means of paying off this debt, and of securing, if possible, another church to the town, there being only church room for 2,000, (including a district church erected within the last few years,) it was suggested by a friend that if a selection of Mr. Crabbe's sermons, to form a volume, could be procured, and permission given for their publication, something considerable might be effected, and thus a heavy responsibility removed from those who are labouring in this important and arduous sphere. The Editor immediately applied to the only surviving son of Mr. Crabbe, the Rev. George Crabbe, Vicar of Bredfield, stating the above facts, and submitting his request, Mr. Crabbe replied, that the sermons having been prepared without the remotest idea of publication, he was unwilling to commit them to the press. It was further represented, that although they would be given to the public in their unrevised condition, yet the known character of the Author would secure their favourable reception, and their intrinsic merit be discovered under their

original simplicity. Knowing the deep interest his father ever manifested towards Trowbridge, of which he was Rector upwards of eighteen years, Mr. Crabbe at length kindly acceded to the request, making the stipulation that it should be particularly and distinctly stated that the sermons were never intended for publication. Mr. Crabbe was further requested to edit the work ; this he declined, but at the same time kindly afforded every assistance in selecting the sermons. And the Editor takes this opportunity of acknowledging with grateful feelings the kindness of the family of the Author, and especially and publicly offers his sincere thanks to the Rev. George Crabbe, for the permission given to publish, and the assistance afforded in doing so.

The Sermons thus presented to the public just as they were delivered, the Editor feels persuaded will be perused with deep interest, and, under the divine blessing, with much benefit. He commends them to the kindness of the courteous reader, pleading the circumstances under which they make their appearance as his claim for criticism being withheld, and defects passed over with indulgence. The Editor, in conclusion, cherishes an anxious hope, that through the liberality of the friends of the Church, this work will supply the means not only of discharging the debt due, but of raising a noble memorial to the name of Crabbe, in the erec-

tion of another church at Trowbridge, the parish in which he so long laboured and was so much beloved.

*Rectory, Trowbridge,
May, 1850.*

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SERMON I.

THE TRUE WORSHIPPER.

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“ God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

THESE words were spoken by our Lord to the woman of Samaria, who inquired of him, whether on the mountain of that country, where the Samaritans had their temple, or in Jerusalem, was the place where men ought to worship ! In Jerusalem certainly was the place appointed by God, and so far the Samaritans were mistaken ; but the Jews also, in part, mistook, for they imputed too much sanctity to the *place*, and too little to the *act* of worship, and therefore it was necessary that our great Teacher (among other divine purposes of his mission) should open the

eyes of his hearers to this truth, that the place and the forms of worship, the outward shows and signs of religion, the temple, the times, the sacrifices, and the rites : all these, though allowed as helps, yet are only helps, because religion must dwell inwardly in the spirit, and they that worship God truly, must worship him in spirit and in truth. And this alone one would hope must put an end to men's disputes and quarrels and vain contentions about places and forms of worship ; for if religion be indeed within us, and if it consist, as surely it doth, of faith and hope and charity, of love to God and love to man, of trust in our Lord and Saviour, repentance for sins past and resolution to live a holy and heavenly life,—I say if this be religion, then why should we make of so much consequence anything besides ? It is necessary for good order and propriety—for the sake of uniformity and peace, that men may assemble, and praise, and pray to their God, through the mediation of their Redeemer, and may ask such things as be requisite for the body and the soul ! For these things the places of worship must be appointed, and who so proper to appoint them as the lawful governors of a christian land ?

And with regard to the forms of christian worship, who so likely to be correct and proper, and becoming in such things as persons brought up in every useful species of learning, taught from their

youth in the Scriptures, and elected from their brethren to be guides and directors of Christ's flock ? Such were the pious and learned men to whom we are indebted for our Church, our prayers, our litany, our creeds, and all our decent and judicious forms ! And how men can think it right to contend and dispute respecting such points, if they be once agreed in the essentials, that is, if they have repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a pious resolution of living to their God, is, I confess, most astonishing ! It is as if two persons should agree in the way they are travelling, and then quarrel for the right or the left hand side ; or as if they should consent to serve a good master in all such essential and important articles as he has appointed, and then should be angry with, and grievously vex and distress each other only about trivial matters which they have provided for themselves as helps and assistances in their great work.

If (and it truly is so) pious and careful men have formed our books of prayer, and all our rites and ceremonies, which are neither many nor burthensome, what reasonable person would be at the pain and trouble of seeking other forms and other customs and institutions which cannot have such high authority, and most likely will not have so much knowledge and judgment bestowed upon them ? but if any choose, nevertheless, to depart

from the great body of the national church on this account, at least let them retain the great and essential points, christian charity and reciprocal good will. If they will not worship with us, at least let them depart and be at peace with us and with themselves, never forgetting that, God as a spirit, (wheresoever he is worshipped,) must be served and adored and obeyed, in spirit and in truth. Man, as a creature, formed of earth and quickened by the breath of life as a reasonable soul in human flesh subsisting, must have an outward expression of religion and times for meeting in public worship. Ministers also must be appointed, and all other things held in respect by the reasonable worshipper who would do all things, as St. Paul advises, in decency and in order ; but he will take great care to distinguish between all these things and religion itself. He will recollect that religious persons may and would be so if they were in a desert without ministers, churches, forms, or customs of any kind.

Nay, if deprived of vocal organs ; if the mind were left whole and the soul retained her faculties, there would be religion, there would be the true and spiritual worship. And such as is probably that of many orders of superior creatures. Creatures to whom their God may speak, and whom he may make abundantly happy, by the blessed inspiration, that needs no form of words or sound

of voice. Of this we know not ; but we are told that God knoweth the thoughts of man ; that none of our secrets are hidden from him. We are told also that he sheddeth abroad his grace, that he giveth light and hope and favour to the children of men, and if so, then doth man converse with his Maker and the Creator with his creatures without any external or intervening assistance. We know also on the best and surest authority that all our desires, hopes, wishes, and purposes, all resistance or compliance with temptation, every good thought indulged, and every vain and wicked thought rejected, are known to this great and all-discerning power. Of whom cometh that blessedness of an approving mind, that lightness and joy of a devout spirit, but of our merciful and gracious Lord ? Let me not appear an advocate for enthusiastic imaginary comforts, for flights and fancies and feelings which weak or volatile spirits are prone to. I know too well the mistakes made by the unstable and light-minded, by persons tossed about by every wind of doctrine, now raised to the hope of heaven, and then sunk to the depths of despondency. But while we reject the counterfeit, shall we deny the real happiness of a religious mind ? or will you say, how do you know the one from the other ? the workings of our own fancy from the visitations of the power of grace. I answer, God hath given

us reason to be our guide in this and all other doubts not determined by his word. If our joy be the answer of a good conscience thoroughly examined ; if our comfort be that of our sincerity and piety confirmed and persisted in ; if we rejoice in the victory of our resolution over evil passions, or in the doing some act of piety or goodness against our natural or carnal will ; in fact, if our spirit is made happy by the obedience which is our duty, and it is not the flash of momentary delight, but the indwelling satisfaction of a constant piety, then where is our danger ? What is our apprehension ? The Spirit then beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of adoption ; but if our joy comes and goes, we know not why ; if it be kindled by the solitary meditation or momentary devotion, or a warm and passionate strain of piety in a prayer or a discourse, then may we reasonably fear that such feelings are deceitful, and have neither the source nor the effect of heavenly joy. The light of the sun, and the blaze of a meteor, do not more differ than the warmth and comfort of real piety and the surprise and glow of kindled zeal. A Christian should suspect all such feelings as come without reasonable cause, and leave no proof behind that their origin is divine; and the best proof we can have is a stronger and more confirmed resolution to live a life of purity, piety, and peace in consequence of them.

I am well assured that there is nothing new in this doctrine; we all know hearers, as well as preachers, that in the heart dwells true religion, from that alone proceeds acceptable praise and accepted prayer. But I am assured also that we are perpetually taken away from this doctrine. Forms will have their effect on bodies, and if we do not take care, will have more effect than things essential on the spirit. Why do so many persons go to this or that preacher, or to different places of worship, if they did not too much rest in what they hear that has a pleasing novelty in it, and too little in what they perform, acts of piety and sincere devotion from their own soul ?

What can a preacher do for you ? At best he can but persuade and exhort, and sometimes enforce a duty or explain a difficulty. He is called upon to pray with you and for you, and there ends his talk, while, for yourselves you must do infinitely more. You have a great work to do; you must examine into your state of faith and sincerity of obedience ; you must learn what is your love for God and gratitude to your Saviour. You have the part that no minister can do for you, and can scarcely assist you in doing, that of correcting the evil and confirming by pious resolutions, through God's grace, the good within you. To you also belong the real confession as to your heavenly Father, the real absolution, for ours can be but conditional.

At our entrance into the service of the day, we declare to you for what purpose we assemble and meet together. To confess our sins and wickedness manifold, and not cloke them or endeavour vainly to hide them ; to hear and receive his holy word, and to thank him truly for all his mercies, and to ask such things as be needful for the body and soul. Such is our declared purpose ; but it lies with you to effect it ! Manifold as your offences be, are they before you ? are they upon or in your spirit, as sins repented heretofore, or still grievous and burthensome ?

In your thanksgiving *do* you *give* thanks ? give them heartily and fully and with joyful mind ? receive you the word of God with respect and attention, and when you pray for such things as be needful, goes your understanding with the words of the prayer, that it may come up acceptably before your God ? Thus doing you shall worship him in spirit and in truth. True religion is sober, is rational, is pure ; it depends not upon the eloquence of a preacher ; it depends upon your faith, your repentance, your sincerity ; for what can a preacher, however gifted, do for these ? he can but persuade you to look into your own heart, to think religion something not between your minister and you, but between you and your God ; something that he may describe and enforce, but which you must possess and practise : but little depends upon us, upon

you much. We can pray with you, but cannot give you the spirit of prayer ; we can show you what is truth, but you must embrace it. We can call upon God in form and with our voices, but you must join in heart ; you must be sincere, or how can it be done in spirit and in truth ?

As creatures of very different habits, natures, and temperaments, we are liable to errors in each extreme, and that in all we act, in all we feel : but most fatal are these errors in religion ! What mischief have they not done, what needless anxiety have they given to some, what violent wrath have they not excited in others ? In our times, the extremes we most usually behold are indifference on the one hand, and violence on the other. Indifference that nearly falls into hypocrisy, and violence that rises almost to madness. Look at those who are indifferent ! They attend at the tolling of a bell, and read the form of a prayer ; they hear indeed with the outward ears, but the word is not grafted inwardly in the heart. They listen to the word of life as to an often-told tale, and are neither the wiser nor the better for it. As they come led by custom, so they depart to the customary avocations of life, and think of religion no more till they receive the summons again. Look to the fanatics ; they are all life and spirit, and seem to possess feelings which they may suppose to be the love or grace of God ; they encou-

rage and call up, and believe as divine gifts the feelings of their spirit ; they are angry with all opposers, and over fond of all who agree with them ; they go from place to place, the spirit within neither seeks nor delights in repose, and whether troubled or not, it is never at rest.

Lastly, behold the sincere, the devout and reasonable Christian ; he submits to forms, but he rests not in them; to times and manners, but he does so because they are decent and becoming ; he knows that religion is of the heart, and is faith, and hope, and love. Faith, that rests in the redemption of sinful man by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ ! Hope, that looks for eternal life through the resurrection of him who had the victory over the grave ; and love, that after working with trembling obedience, at length casts off fear, and feels joyful because of the reasonable assurance of the glory to come.

SERMON II.

THE FOLLOWER OF CHRIST.

LUKE ix. 57.

“ Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.”

FROM the fifty-seventh verse to the conclusion of this chapter we have some strong and remarkable passages, upon which, if we duly and seriously think, it would much conduce to our spiritual wisdom and improvement. The person who said these words, “ Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,” had seen the wonders of our Redeemer’s healing hand, and heard the wisdom of his heavenly speech ; he was doubtless convinced of his truth, and made sensible of his goodness, his greatness, and his mercy. But what said our Lord ? Would he not invite and encourage a new disciple ? Would he not praise and accept such zeal and such readiness, and say, well done, good and faithful servant ? No ; there was yet

no service, it was profession only ; and the Saviour informed him what (if he indeed became a disciple) he was to expect—"the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." On another occasion, he had said that the disciple was to be as his Lord, and therefore the new convert was to expect no sublunary honour, no worldly comforts, no earthly benefits ; the kingdom of the Master and the reward of the servant were not to be found in the present world ; on the contrary, the Master was to meet with persecution and shame, and the servant, or disciple, was to look for disappointment and reproach. Let no man be deceived by his religion ; the pious will have many privileges and much happiness, but there is no promise of these arising from the things of this world ; on the contrary, they are quite independent of them, and have their source in God, who bestows on his believing people joy and peace. The Christian has always something to give up, much to strive against, and to call up his fears and his repentance. What a miserable creature, therefore, must be he who professes to be religious, and yet has no real inward true piety ; for such persons have all the outward evils which in this world follow and appertain to a holy and religious life, and have none of the inward, the spiritual consolations which they who are faithful always enjoy—the clear con-

science, the lively hopes, and the heart that is devoted to God and resigned to his will.

Our blessed Lord deceived no man ; he did not describe the kingdom of God as easy to be inherited, nor the narrow way as delightful to be passed ; but he invited those who heard him, by greater motives, and more glorious prospects : so did St. Paul ; he did not hold out prospects of what we call pleasure in this life, but present inward satisfaction and content, and indescribable blessings in the life that is to come ; in fact, the Christian is called to a race, a pilgrimage, a warfare ; he must strive, he must contend, and he must persevere. The profession which this person made was generous and large, “Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,” and yet we all profess the same—we all vow to follow the precepts and duties of religion whithersoever they lead, and surely we should do well to consider soberly and solemnly whether we are led by them. It is no difficult matter to profess religion—it is no very difficult matter to desire and wish to be religious, nor is it any extraordinary difficulty to see and own its value and importance ; but truly and indeed to live a religious life, and without turning aside to follow our Master, as it asks the greatest exertion, so it has the highest reward. When our Saviour said to another man, “Follow me,” he replied, “Suffer me first to go and bury my father.”

When to another, “Follow thou me,” he wanted first to take leave of them of his household. It is the case with most men; they may have no parent to attend to his grave, they may have no leave to take of an household, but some with one excuse, some with another, put off the entire following of their Lord, the first great and solemn duty, that which they know to be required of them, and which we all confess to be requisite above all things, till either they cease to be moved by the call, or get into habits of putting it away from them till they find no leisure to entertain it, forgetting what our Lord himself practised, “I must work while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work.”

Here are then two kinds of persons described by the evangelist, the one who professes to be ready for all their duties, “Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,” and the others called, but not ready—invited, but willing to be excused for the present; for though we may differ in what we prefer to our duty, yet if we prefer anything, we are disobedient to the call. Let us return to the former kind of these persons, those who profess to be followers of our Lord—who are they? Are not all here present? else *why* present? Why do we come into a christian assembly, if not as Christians? Doubtless we come all under the class and description of those who would be thought, and who think themselves, ser-

vants of the Lord of life—his people, and the sheep of his pasture. I conclude no one would say he comes to this sacred place for any other purpose than his religious duties : there are indeed the idle and inconsiderate who come because they are compelled by custom, or because they know not otherwise how to dispose of their time ; but in general we may hope that we assemble in the house of God for the serious and solemn purpose of devotion, and therefore do in fact and in word, in the beautiful services of our Church, proclaim our adherence to the faith of Christ crucified.

Such, then, being our profession, we so far resemble him who said, “I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,” that is, I will do whatever thy holy religion commandeth me. Let us then attend to our Lord’s reply, “The Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” It is not an easy, though it is a happy life ; you must expect to meet with difficulties and to encounter temptations ; you must set a constant watch on your passions and inclinations, denying all ungodliness, and worldly, that is, evil desires, and live soberly and righteously in the present world. How many of all ages and conditions in life, live as if *professing* to follow their Master was sufficient, but when the true disciples heard the call of their divine Master, they left their all to follow him. It is very probable that our Saviour, who could see the heart of man, saw somewhat of

lurking insincerity (though perhaps unknown to himself) in the heart of the person who was so eager to follow Him, and therefore gave that caution that he might know and consider what it was to follow Christ the Redeemer ; he might possibly think that it was only to hear his divine words, and to behold his mighty works, and that he had no more to do than to converse with the objects of his mercy, with his apostles and disciples, and eat with gratitude and wonder the loaves and fishes multiplied under the Saviour's hands : this was not all, nor the chief duty and occupation of a disciple ; he was to endure the wants of nature and hazard the dangers of teaching his Master's doctrine ; he was to disregard the anger and malice of the Jews, and to be with his Lord in the seasons of reproach and persecution, to go to the garden of Gethsemane, the hall of judgment, and to the place of crucifixion. For this, perhaps, he might not be prepared. He was going forth to the battle without putting on the whole armour of God.

And this reasoning will equally apply to the present times of the Church. There are numbers who are professedly Christians, but they will not duly consider what is indeed Christianity ; they will attend some place of worship, and will not often perhaps step aside from the outward habits, the decent and serious forms of our holy profession ; they are baptized into the flock, and con-

sider themselves as a part of the fold of the good Shepherd ; but when more than this is required of them, they do not find in themselves a disposition or inclination to comply, nor have the resolution to follow their Master, when the way becomes painful--when hard denials and severe duties are required of them in the exercise of the most material obligations of religion. The duties they shrink from are these,—the continual strife with themselves, their stronger passions, and appetites—especially the sin that doth most easily beset them ; in mortification and self-correction, in watching their hearts that they may be pure and clean, their habits, that no evil ones may grow upon them and rule them ; add to these, the duty of earnest and daily prayer, “ Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation,” of frequent and solemn meditation of their latter end, of judgment to come, and of eternity, and casting away all sinful thoughts as they arise, and governing the tongue to virtue and godliness, looking attentively and constantly to all they do, not only the more important actions, but the daily, hourly conduct, that all may be done (as far as human infirmity admits) innocently and usefully to themselves, friendly and beneficially to their neighbours, and in obedience and duty to their God.

We have only to look abroad, and we shall see, only to read the common language of mankind,

and we shall learn, only to make use of our understanding, and we must perceive, that among those who profess and call themselves Christians, there are too many whose conduct and habits speak of them more strongly and loudly than a thousand professions; that they are either those who make religion a form, or in the number of those unhappy self-deceivers, who think they believe and follow what they actually refuse to love and practise; who say, "Lord, Lord, but do not those things which he commandeth." This is a serious subject, and must be treated seriously. Religion is of infinite consequence or it is nothing. These instances given by the evangelist which I have just repeated are very remarkable; the first, the man mentioned in the text was warned that in following the Saviour, there was and would be much opposition to the nature of man; the others, that no worldly obligations, such as taking leave of a household; no inferior duties, such as burying a father, must stand in the way of that superior call, the voice of conscience, and the word of God. It would be very useful if we were often to ask ourselves, What does my religion do for me? how does it act and operate in my mind? is it a sufficient light and guide to me, so that I see clearly what is my duty, what I have promised and vowed, not by my sureties only, but for myself? Is it a sufficient check and tie upon my wishes, my carnal

will, so that I am kept by it, from all allowed or habitual offences ? Has it such influence upon me that I often and solemnly consider, what I was and am—a fallen but a ransomed creature, and what I should and will be, a faithful and obedient soldier and servant of my Lord Jesus Christ ? These questions we may surely answer in one way or other, and many similar self-inquiries concerning our actual obedience, our progress in holiness, and our stedfast or wavering faith,—in truth, *they* must pay constant and prayerful attention to themselves and their improvement who hope to follow their Lord and his religion whithersoever he goeth and to whatsoever it leadeth—whether to the marriage-feast or to the last supper—whether to aid the sufferings of the wretched, or to endure ourselves the calamities and miseries of life.

Before I conclude, let me remark that what has been observed of man's carelessness, his sins, and his disobedience, does not extend to his weakness and frailties. The Lord knoweth (even better than we know ourselves) “ whereof we are made, he remembereth that we are but dust.” There are failings in the most perfect, there were even in the disciples themselves. “ Who can understand his errors ?” says the Psalmist ; “ cleanse thou me from my secret faults.” “ If thou, Lord, art severe to mark what is done amiss, oh ! Lord, who may abide ?” “ In many things,” says St. James, “ we

offend all ;” that is, *all* are oftentimes offenders, therefore let us beware, in passing judgment on ourselves, that we do not mistake wilful and repeated sin for sudden or light frailty, that we do not consider as frailties *any* flagrant, allowed, or habitual offences of word, thought, or deed. We are sure God is merciful and loveth mercy ; he will not be hasty nor severe to punish. What can be more gracious than this declaration, which doubtless every sincere Christian may take to himself, “ If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the strifes of the children of men, but my mercy shall not depart away from him ;” but then all this implies and requires on our part, sincere repentance and habitual obedience ; and while we comfort ourselves (as assuredly we may and ought) with such declarations of God’s mercy and love to sinners, let us reflect that all this promise of mercy is to invite and guide us into the paths of faith and holiness, and for those who will not obey such invitations, more solemn advice is given and more awful reasons for it pronounced, for if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Then think, when tempted by any sin or frailty, we cannot follow our Lord except we resist temptation ; when we are backward and slothful in our christian course, we cannot follow our Lord unless we strive against flesh and blood, and work while

it is called to-day. When we are in trouble, need, sorrow, sickness, or any other adversity, we cannot follow our Lord unless we bear these trials patiently. When we perform our religious duties, public or private, we cannot follow our Lord unless we engage in them earnestly and faithfully ; and finally, we cannot follow our Lord into that state of glory whither he is gone in triumph, unless we follow his example in this state of trial and temptation, through which he led the way before us.

SERMON III.

THE WORTH OF THE SOUL.

ST. MATTHEW xvi. 26.

“ What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ? ”

“ As I have a soul to be saved,” is sometimes the assertion of those who do not consider whether they *have* a soul to be saved, much less do they reflect whether they have *not* a soul to be lost. Yet the salvation of the soul, that which is the immortal part of us, is the most glorious prospect we can have, and who is so dreadfully rash as to feel without awe, that his own soul may be lost ? Let us ask our hearts, and ask them seriously, how we could bear the terrible, shocking assurance that our immortal part, after we are “ delivered from the burden of the flesh,” will not be in joy and felicity, but in anguish and despair,

“ where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” Little, then, would it have availed us to have had possession of the *whole* world. But how small a portion of that world often wins and purchases a soul ! How cheaply is this the most precious of merchandize sold ! what trifling things do men ask for such inestimable treasure ! The poor savage gives gold, and silver, and jewels, for beads and other trifles. But what does the poor (so called) Christian ? He gives his soul, his eternal inheritance, the treasure which worlds ought not to purchase, for some poor passions, and short indulgences ; he gives the very seat and source of enjoyment for something which conscience lets no man thoroughly enjoy. For suppose you could gain the whole world in exchange for your soul, what would you gain ? Certainly no more of it than you could enjoy ; therefore the possession of the whole world is only so much wealth, pleasure, power, and honour, as you could feel and taste, and partake without pain and satiety, and how *little* that is, misers and profligates could soon inform you. Now whenever you knowingly do wrong, you make advances to sell your soul, and whenever you deliberately and habitually take unlawful and forbidden gain or pleasure, you are enjoying (if it can be enjoyed) the price of your soul. In the first place, should you make this dreadful bargain, I will endeavour

to show you that you gain nothing that is really good or profitable, and then I will offer to your reason some considerations on the nature of these agreements with sin—these silent negotiations with the power who makes merchandize of men. Suppose you could by doing wickedly gain all you wanted in the world—money, power, pleasure. Count your gains. Others have had these things, and you never heard they were made happy by them. In fact, we should leave out money and power, because these are but the means of pleasure of one kind or other, and the whole inquiry will be then into the worth of worldly pleasure. Count your gain. Ask your own heart—Can any pleasure you ever took ; or can you conceive any so great as to counterbalance all the pain that is inseparable from human nature and human life, if there were no prospect beyond this present scene? Is it worth all the fears and alarms of infancy—all the disappointments and correction of youth—all the care and trouble that man endures to obtain it ? Does this pleasure that the world giveth, balance pain, sorrow, disappointment, and sickness ? Does it make you so happy that you feel no wants or fears for yourself or others ? no apprehensions of an evil in this life, or any dread of losing it ?

We may answer that question at once. No worldly pleasure is able to do any of these things. Pain, care, grief, trouble, sickness, loss, disappoint-

ment, and the fear of death, all of them, nay, any of them, can at any time chase away our unstable pleasures, and crush the tender and feeble tribe of our amusements, vanities, and relaxations, as well as the more valued and social enjoyments of life. So that, could you have pleasure without selling your soul, (as, indeed, all good men have in that degree God permits in this mortal state,) could you insure the things you desire and covet most, still they are not permanently, not seriously good, they give but little and that not long, and life has a thousand evils, every one painful enough, to subdue and kill these weak and precarious objects of our pursuit. Reflect then ! whatsoever earthly good you delight in—whatever gain you could enjoy, at such an enormous expense as your soul—reflect ! that your utmost gains are small, and soon gone. We need not dwell on this head any longer, because you will confess there can be no gain in the whole world which can pay the dreadful hazard of a soul's loss.

Let us, therefore, proceed to the more important part of our subject, and see *how* we lose or sell the soul for such enjoyments. We know that no person makes those contracts with the evil spirits, and agrees to those astonishing articles, which some wicked people have formerly been accused of doing. No one thus invites or invokes his soul's enemy, to give him power, or

pleasure of any kind ; nor signs with his blood the bargain for his soul. But surely every evil action you deliberately perform, every evil word and thought that you cherish, and which God's law and your conscience condemn, all your dealings with man which are not just and true—all your self-indulgences which are not pure and lawful—all which the Scripture forbids, and you allowedly and habitually commit,—surely is a sale, a bargain, with your tempter and accuser for so much worldly pleasure or profit at the expense of your soul. It is a silent bargain which, if not broken, does sell the soul for eternity, just as effectually as if it was openly sold to Satan and made over by contract. For is it not said that the great deluder goes about seeking whom he may devour ? Do not temptations everywhere beset you ? If you deliberately fall into them, are you not rewarded by some present enjoyment which tempted you ? and what is that reward but the price given you for leaving the narrow way, the paths of virtue and religion ? that is, in other words, we thus lose or sell our souls, and gain the poor and perishing pleasures we coveted. It may be said, and truly said, that all men do wrong, and that the best are only the least guilty, and therefore that there is no cause to call every deviation from rectitude the sale or loss of our soul. This is true ; but we are not speaking of the infirmity of the Christian,

but of habitual sins. And let us remember that it is not by great crimes only that we sell the soul. This is done as effectually by an habitual course of what the irreligious person considers as small offences. First, he thinks his sins few and little. Is it not a little one ? And then he fancies there is no danger in committing them, and so he grows secure, and commits greater, and thus infallibly acquires the habit of sin, and generally falls from one step to a lower and lower still. Our soul's enemy would persuade us, just as we would persuade ourselves,—he always insinuates into our minds, “ Where is the danger ? ” “ Where is the hazard ? ” “ Are not thousands greater sinners than you are ? ” “ Will God condemn you for such little pardonable light offences ? ” “ Trifles, natural indulgences, customary, habitual frailties ? Will an immortal soul be lost for the weakness and indulgence of a mere inclination ? ” “ Indulge ! indulge ! O man ; seize the occasion, relax a little from the severity of virtue, and be happy ! ” Thus reasons our soul's enemy, or thus persuade our desires and passions, our senses, our companions, or our opportunities, and so men yield and become confirmed in the habit of disobedience, and are finally lost. Let me, therefore, repeat that in every fault, every little forbidden indulgence, there is some danger, in many much danger, and that nothing sinful can be done with-

out *such* hazard, that, as if you could see the end to which *all* sin leads, you would instantly refrain. Again we say it is not only, or chiefly, by great sins that the soul is lost. Would any one in his senses rush into a lion's den, or into fire ? Of course not, even if he were quite weary of life. Because we could all see *there* our danger and the torment that must follow. So *they who* dare not commit great and flagrant crimes, as murder, theft, adultery, fall into the same danger—hazard the same torment, by what *they* call human infirmities. But open your eye, your mind's eye, and you will perceive the den ! the fire ! in all allowed habitual sin : you will see how *they* venture who knowingly do wrong. Look at the drunkard who forgets his family, and his health, and his soul's peace, in the riot of intoxication—is he in no danger ? Look rightly, and you will see him standing in the midst of false security near that fire which every day and hour threatens to consume him. Look also at the overbearing tyrannical man, who is hard of heart to his neighbour, covetous, proud, crafty, worldly-minded. He stands, as he thinks, upon the firm ground of worldly prudence, but it is in the midst of the same imminent danger, as the same gross offender. And *there* is he who leads a corrupt and sensual life ; he indulges, though you cannot see him ; his crimes are very secret, and he fancies there is no

danger ; but there is a precipice before him which he sees not, and conscience behind him which will soon arrest him ; he will fall into the trap of Satan, and then despair will stand over him fallen, and drive repentance from him.

Some one may say, But these also are grievous sinners, not such as I am. Observe, then, a little offender. Now he avoids all the open dangers of the way through life ; there he sees a great temptation, and great peril joined with it, and he withstands it, but soon after is tempted by a smaller offence ; he deliberates ! He looks about and finds no hazard ; he can repent ; he thinks he does no great evil, (none, saith the tempter,) and the habit is continued. So he walks all his days, and what is the end ? “ He who despises little things shall fall by little and little.” He is bound down with small cords, but they are many : the arrows are not deep that wound him, but they pierce in every part ; the way to repentance is nowhere entirely shut, but there are so many impediments to remove of one kind or other, that before the labour finishes, the life is gone. Hope that never was hindered by any *great* weight, sinks under the oppression of every day’s frailty. Beware, therefore, of all *approach* to the sale of your immortal part ; beware of little sins, or what you may fancy such ; all proceeds from an irreligious state of mind, a careless indifference to

your soul. Do not then despise your birthright. You are admitted as an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven : an heir of God, and joint-heir of Christ. Do not only *keep* your hope, but prize it as you ought ; think it insufficient not to sell your heritage, but value it above all things, for it will be of inestimable value when all that you now prize and covet are lost and perished *for ever*.

And now to apply what has been said to ourselves. Whoever among us has lived in any known sin, small or great,—whoever has lived a careless irreligious life, did while he so lived sell his soul ; but none of us are innocent and free, we are all brought in guilty before God—we all have a ransom to pay. Man's account with his soul is very great, how shall he settle it ? Let him plead the redemption of our Lord, and the price paid for man—the precious blood of Jesus ! Let him turn unto him with full purpose of heart, truly repenting him of the past. And let him employ all his powers, faculties, and acquirements in the service of his Lord ; his time, his thoughts, his care, his prayers ; and this preparation should be instant. Who, my brethren, who would not prepare a place in the world of spirits whither he is going ? And we can. Our God has given us light to know the way, and he has sent his Son, who is the way, the truth, and the life. And his Spirit will guide us, and when we pray, grace will be given us. All

invite us to be happy. What shall a man give to gain such a prospect as this ? What would it profit him to gain the whole world and lose it ? Oh ! my beloved brethren, be assured you gain the world, and more than a thousand worlds, gaining life everlasting.

SERMON IV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY PIETY.

ECCLES. xii. 1.

“ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”

To remember our Creator in the religious sense of the words is to become above all things considerate and attentive to the concerns of the soul ; in fact, to turn from every evil way, every sinful habit, every criminal pursuit, and to reflect with penitent and contrite hearts on what we have done, and with serious resolutions on what he ought to do. On this subject it is natural to reflect on the advice given from age to age from the old to the young, who, once being young, had the same advice administered to them, which they in their days were disposed to receive as the common admonition of the old, and to regard it as a

thing of course ; as if it were the very duty of the elders to teach, and the privilege of the younger to disregard—and yet every one in their turn found out at length that it was really and in fact a duty which demanded their most serious attention ; they found temptations that befel them, they met trials, which, whether prepared for them or not, they must undergo, and then they lamented their neglect of admonitions,—then, too, they judged it expedient to give the advice to others, to which they themselves had paid so little regard;—thus from father to son, from generation to generation, the time for profitable instruction, for laying the right foundation of piety in season, passes away. Yet happily it is not so with all. Some are wiser ; some do indeed remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and so, when the evil days come, and the time of their death draws nigh, they are happy enough to feel that they *have* pleasure in them. When age has stolen upon us ; when we can enjoy but few pleasures of this life ; when our strength is nearly exhausted, and our spirits are cold and depressed ; when the present world has ceased to make its great promises, and we feel our disappointment in those it had made ; when the grave will sometimes appear, as the enjoyments of life retire from us, it is then common for many (for *all* who are not lost to reflection) to turn their views to a consideration of

futurity, to think of a judgment to come, and in what degree preparation has been made for it ; then men endeavour to make their peace with themselves and with their God. It is indeed a late repentance, a lingering piety, but it is all that can be done ; how much better, then, happier, nay, more pleasant, easy, and delightful, to prevent this late, this doubtful repentance, by that early devotion to divine truth, accompanied by all the affection and earnestness that youth and health and strength bring with them. And to this you are thus invited. And among the arguments for remembering our Creator in our early days is this, that when our evil days are come, it is possible that we *cannot* remember him then; these early days are certainly the proper season for piety, and it may be truly said of them, “ behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.” Therefore let not the young delude themselves with unavailing purposes; we will think seriously on these unquestionable duties at some future time, when arrived at such a period, on such an occasion, at such an advanced state of our life, or when this or that event has taken place, for then we shall have quiet and leisure for such devotion. Say not these things, nor purpose them in your heart, for such resolutions are both feeble and dangerous; if you indeed purpose to be ever religious, begin to be so *when you purpose.*

You can have nothing at this time to prevent you, except those things that in greater number and with greater force (while your powers are enfeebled) will prevent you hereafter. The cares of life will certainly come on with increasing demand on your time, and the sorrows and troubles with multiplying force on your spirits; difficulties, doubts, perplexities, troubles, beset men in their progress, and oftentimes the very calamities which should lead them to seek comfort in religion, so engross and overpower their minds, that they prevent them from turning to that source whence their true help and consolation would arise. In all these cases, there is a double task and labour for the mind, not only to live to the future, but to recover from the evil effect of the past : *prevent, therefore*, by an early choice, this error of delay; seize the hour while it is yours; the past has fled from your vigilance, the future you know not if it will offer to your acceptance; the present only is yours, and of that we may still repeat, “Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.” The advice of the inspired writer is not a matter of indifference; it is not a something which you may either take or refuse as you may be disposed; the neglect of it assuredly is most criminal, and argues something like a determination to persist in error. The whole of men’s reasonable and active life is short, and should be

all religious and useful, and being thus, would also be delightful; but we are weak and frail, and God knoweth our frailty; we have therefore many helps for our infirmities, and, on true repentance, gracious forgiveness of our omissions and offences.

Yet this forgiveness requires acceptance on our part, and a resolution to continue in the covenant made in our baptism, to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and continue his faithful soldiers and servants to our lives' end. We should do wisely if we often reflected on this engagement, and duly considered and examined our hearts, inquiring diligently whether we be indeed these soldiers and servants, diligent, faithful, obedient; otherwise, though you may not deny or reject your part of the covenant, you do not observe and fulfil it; though you may be called Christians, you are not working in your Lord's vineyard, you are cold to the cause, and do not take any part in the conflict of Christianity. Consider, then, your high calling and profession; what great things are done for you, and what good things must be done by you: consider what it is you are striving for by a life of christian obedience; what will be the consequence of your not striving, and what enemies you have to strive against. You are called to the warfare that you may obtain an eternal state of glory and happi-

ness, which our Saviour has promised to all who truly and in heart serve and obey him; that you may obtain in this life a pure and quiet conscience, the victory over evil passions and lawless desires, an honourable victory over the adversary of man, and the temptations by which your weakness is assailed; it is to be a fellow-soldier with saints and martyrs, and to take the good part which none ever repented taking, and none who persevere in, can fail in the reward. The consequence, if you do not take this good part is, that you will be overcome by your enemies, and lose all the gracious promises and glorious expectations of the gospel covenant. You will become the slave and servant of sin; you will bring upon yourself sorrow and trouble and fruitless regret, the anger of your offended Lord, and, at the end of a misspent life, the terrors of an awakened conscience, and the fearful expectation of punishment to come. Reasonable persons will not hesitate about the part they ought to take, but it is a common delusion with the young that they have time to spare; they forget how easily habits are contracted, and how difficult it is to break them off; they also forget that though they slumber, their spiritual enemies do not, and that though thousands have deferred their repentance too long, no one ever began the work of salvation too soon; it may easily be, and often is, too late to correct the evils, but it can

never be too early to guard against them. The enemies you have to contend with, are the temptations of the world, of your own corrupt nature, and those which the evil one brings against you. These are so many, and so well known, that there is neither time nor occasion to repeat them; you all know the sin that most easily besets you, the evil desire that would draw you into disobedience, and by acts of disobedience into destruction. You know also the commandments of your God, and the divine precepts of your Saviour, and can be at no loss either to see your danger, or to know your duty; and if you are assailed by the urgency of any evil inclination, if the temptation be strong, and the heart weak, there is then for your comfort and security the great remedy of prayer, to which no one has recourse with earnestness and sincerity without receiving strength and protection. Yet so many are these temptations, and so various, that no one, however young, can safely venture on delay, or trifle with the danger; and if this be doubted, they may inquire of those who have passed that season of trial, and whether they themselves have succeeded or not, they will inform you that there is no time to lose, for if they succeeded, they are now rejoicing that they began so early to serve the Lord, and if they did not, they are now regretting that they put off the purpose until their task became grievous and painful.

I have now to lay before you the natural consequences of both this neglect, and this early choice of a pious and religious life; and, first, consider the fruit of this negligence and forgetfulness, this dangerous and fearful trifling with your souls, this sin and folly. In this case, you will have at best a youth of continual self-accusation—self-accusation without amendment, and fear without effectual sorrow. As you advance in life, and your habits are confirmed, you may not so often be disturbed by conscience; but the reproof will be more bitter, and though the pleasure of sinful courses will die away, the sins and the habits will remain to disturb you. Your old age, if you arrive at it, will be disrespected, and its infirmities grievous, and perhaps insupportable. You will have these infirmities of the old without their consolations, and while this world becomes more and more a burden to your spirits, you will less and less endure the thoughts of parting with it, so that even the miseries here will be more bearable and easy than the fears and apprehensions of the evil to come; and if it should be said there are old and very sinful men who do not feel this alarm and terror, I would answer, so much the more awful is their case, for who is there in youth so daring and impious as to think without terror of becoming an old and confirmed sinner, who had lost the feeling both of his offences and his

danger ? On the contrary, what blessings are attendant on early piety ! Whatever evils the world has in prospect, you will be enabled to bear them, because you have not sold yourself to the temptations it presented. Whatever you possess, a good conscience will enable you to enjoy; and whatever you want, christian resignation will teach you to be contented : a blessing will accompany all your endeavours. Your reflections will be happy. You will not be afraid of sudden evil when it cometh, but will go to rest in assurance of heavenly favour, and rise with the comfort of divine protection. Respect you will have from all good men, and even the wicked in their hearts will give it ; thus life, with all its sorrows, will be a blessing —prosperity will not be embittered by reflection, and adversity will be sweetened by it. Your thoughts will be composed, and the affairs of the world will proceed without interrupting your tranquillity. Finally, and above all, when this life is ended, you will depart in peace ; yours will be that immortality which your Redeemer has both purchased and promised, and of which, as you have read, “ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.” Be assured, then, that of all the blessings and advantages of life, an early turning to God is the greatest ; early conversion has in it all that is desirable, without the bitter pangs of a wounded conscience, and with little of the danger of a re-

lapse into sin; without a painful consideration of the evil which a person's own bad example may have brought on others, or the influence which sinful habits may have on the repenting sinner's own soul, too often conquered by the power of sin.

And what is yet a stronger proof of the advantage of an early casting away all works of darkness, there is time and opportunity for religious improvement, for laying up the treasure, and for acquiring those habits of holiness and virtue which the late repenting sinner may earnestly desire but cannot effectually obtain. Let us refer to our Lord's parable on this important subject, the talents distributed for increase and improvement. What increase, what improvement are they to make whose repenting and wounded spirits are hurried by hopes and fears, by strife with long indulged habits, and constant endeavours to walk in that narrow way which, being so lately found, is found so full of difficulty and trouble; but in the early repentant and religious mind, improvement of the talents becomes its natural and pleasant occupation, and the ten, or the five, or even the one, as it has pleased God to give them, are increased and kept in constant employment. Observe the parable of the leaven: in time, but not without, the whole is leavened—the whole heart and mind. Now in the late repentance

there is not this time, and consequently we lose the proof that the change is effected, that the passions are commanded, that the will is thoroughly controlled, that the love of earthly things is become a real steady desire for heavenly. But when the conversion was early, the change is *not only* wrought with less difficulty, but there is evidence of the effect; there is time for religion to become habit, and duty pleasure; the strife of the sinful passions is abated, and the struggle of the mind in the strong opposition of duty and desire, has settled into a calm; the things of a better world have then their full weight, and in consequence hope has become fixed, and the whole is leavened. There is but one parable which appears to make a late conversion, and of course repentance, equally availing with an early turning to the Lord our God, and continuing to be his faithful people until our lives end; this is the parable of the labourers sent into the vineyard at the different hours of the day, that is, called to religious thoughts and duties in the earlier or the later periods of our lives. Here, indeed, they who had laboured but one hour, were made equal with those who had borne the burden and heat of the day. But then to whom shall we compare such labourers? Not surely to the late repenting sinners, who were from infancy called and invited, nay, entreated and implored, to accept the offered

mercy, and they would not ! The labourers of the gospel went into the vineyard as soon as they were called. If we liken them to any, it must be to aged heathen, who are induced by the persuasion of christian missionaries to enter into the covenant of the gospel, and accept the mercy of the Saviour, of which they had not heard before ; but this has no resemblance to the sinner who has been called through life, and would not hearken till life had little or nothing to give him.

I believe there are many persons in early life, among the thoughtless and wicked, who make a kind of compromise with conscience by resolutions to become faithful and obedient at a later period, but they do not reflect upon the extreme folly as well as the great sinfulness of such poor endeavours to procure a little peace within, such dangerous opiates to gain a troubled and disturbed repose. For what does a person virtually say to his God, who makes these poor unavailing resolutions to be a Christian by-and-bye ? He says to his Lord and Judge, " What you require of me is just and right, and ultimately I perceive, for my own happiness; I am just now engaged by the pleasures fitted to my time of life and my inclinations, but at a later time I will give up my mind to the subject, and live soberly and religiously the rest of my days." A man dares not utter such speeches to his Maker ; but

all such persons in reality so think and act, that it is plain *what* they would say if they spake in truth and sincerity ; and besides this extreme arrogance and folly, there is great danger in making such apologies for putting off the good work ; the excuse cannot be accepted, and the proposed reformation is seldom made. What numbers have died impenitent and hard of heart, who, in the thoughtless levity of youth, resolved to indulge a little while, and then to repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance ! But an early dedication of yourselves to Almighty God, to the duties of religion, and the study and practice of the gospel precepts, is the way to happiness, and it is the only way that renders at least supportable the evils of this world, and it anticipates the happiness and glories of the world to come ; whereas, by deferring this holy work, you not only bring tenfold difficulty and anxiety of spirit, but you can never be certain that when the supposed time for repentance is come, the disposition to repent will come with it ; if you mean ever to lead a religious life ; if you desire the peace which the world cannot give ; if you would live in comfort and die in hope, defer not for any consideration a work of such unparalleled importance ; seize the hour while it is yours ; for whether young or old, we know not what the next may bring forth.

SERMON V.

THE GOOD CONSCIENCE.

1 JOHN iii. 20.

“ If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart,
and knoweth all things.”

To these words are immediately added,—“ Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.” Herein, then, we have the apostle’s account of the effect of conscience ; in the one case, if it condemn us, we may assuredly judge that God will ; and if it condemn us not, we have that proof of our being uncondemned in the sight of God ; yet though generally speaking our conscience may both condemn and acquit us justly ; we must not in all cases rely upon this rule alone, for certainly we may oftentimes acquit, and sometimes, though very rarely, condemn ourselves without sufficient reasons for so doing. It may, therefore, be profitable

for us to inquire into the nature and working of our consciences, to look into the reasons for its not always giving the just answer to our inquiries, to observe how and why it happens that the conscience, which is so excellent a monitor when clear to discern, and uncontrolled by vice or passion, is yet so far from being a just and faithful director, that it goes astray and wants a guide and direction for itself.

“ We trust,” saith St. Paul, “ that we have a good conscience ;” and he might, no doubt, trust safely in the goodness of his conscience, but it is not every one who can, and his very words, “ We trust we have a good conscience,” imply, if they do not directly express, that some have a conscience which is not good, that is, they have lost the proper and right feeling ; so that the sense of good and evil in many cases being obscure, and, as it were, worn away by evil habits, is lost, and conscience either slumbers while evil is committed, or even mistakes the very nature of sin, and rests easy under what should be the burden of its weighty offences. A conscience, when pure and just, I would liken to a dial, upon which the sun shines from heaven, and it therefore cannot err ; but a conscience assailed by and yielding to the indulgence of some passion or persuaded by some false argument, resembles rather the time-pieces made by man’s art,

which though they vary and are more or less correct, yet they are all liable to error; the best do not always go right, they want correction, and must be often (as I may say in this comparison) wound up, or they will, instead of informing us of that which we want to know, namely, "how time passes," lead us into mistakes of more or less importance, and if they are neglected for any length of time, they will become utterly useless, and give no information.

St. Paul says that he exercised himself to have always a good conscience "void of offence," which is a proof that such spiritual exercise is necessary, and that without it, the conscience may not be good. It may then be expedient for us to enter a little on this inquiry, and to point out the errors which we are liable to fall into, that we may avoid them, and, like the holy apostle, exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards men.

Our way is then to inquire, first, what are those things which prevent us, so that we do not possess this excellent monitor, a conscience void of offence ; and, secondly, what those are by which that blessing is to be obtained, premising always that we rely upon the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit in our endeavour for the argument, not only of a good conscience, but of all things that are good. Now though many impediments

might be found that oppose us in this endeavour after a clear and pure conscience, yet they may, I think, be included in these, which I consider as the principal among them ;—first, I would state the neglect of and carelessness in this important inquiry. There are many persons, I am afraid; who, if their conscience do not trouble them, never trouble themselves in reflecting from whence this quiet comes, whether from all being right within, or from never looking within to see what really is there. A conscience of this kind may be void of offence, and yet the person be a gross offender against God. Great and enormous crimes would indeed awaken any conscience not entirely dead and rendered insensible by the repetition of such transgressions ; but I am not speaking of persons thus lost, but of such among us who profess their faith in a Saviour, and the common hope of salvation. Among believers of this description, neglect of and indifference for the answer of a good conscience is but too common a failing. Nay, the very expression, the answer of a good conscience, should show us the necessity of asking the question, or why do we call its report an answer ? An answer to what ? To our own question and self-examination, we ought to reply ; for I know not how we should get an answer of our own conscience without it. It is true that if such Christians as I am supposing were to be seduced into

some great and glaring transgression, as murder, adultery, perjury, and sins of such enormity, conscience would anticipate inquiry, and would not stay to be questioned, but immediately "cry out," and would be attended to, but with this exception, the neglected conscience is but too much inclined to repose, and neither receives alarm nor gives trouble. In the prayer for grace in the Morning Service, we ask of our heavenly Father that he would defend us with his mighty power, and grant that this day we fall into no sin. It is surely then most reasonable, at the conclusion of the day, to inquire of our own hearts whether we have so fallen or not? for is it not a strange impropriety (to speak in the gentlest terms) that we can pray for such blessing as a freedom from sin, and then take no thought whether we have been kept from the evil we so prayed that we might escape. Would we ask even of our fellow-sinner a favour of any kind, and then make no inquiry whether it were granted? If so, then we either set no value upon the thing we asked, or had no dependence upon the person to whom we applied.

I therefore state this neglect and want of fair and full search into our own hearts to be one great cause why our conscience is not the guide and monitor which it might be made with due attention and just inquiry; and, secondly, I conceive that this evil effect upon the conscience is

occasioned by our habits ; and our continually submitting ourselves to what we suppose to be (if we think any thing about them) sins of the smallest possible account, scarcely worth our inquiry, and by no means of that importance that they should make us unhappy, or disturb the repose of our conscience. But in answer to this, I must observe that there are no such things as little sins; for sins are transgressions against God's commandments. Crimes of little weight and consequence, that is, offences against the laws of man, there may be ; but not sins. No sin is a trifle ; what is the sin that we can lightly estimate ? and yet there are those which some habitually pass over, and by which their consciences are not offended : the habit of relating falsehoods in what are called trifling matters is one of these evils; for there is in some persons the vanity of speaking marvellous things, or the desire of entertaining their friends, or some such small inducement continually leads to these breaches of truth. It may be said that this is not injurious to any one, but that depends upon the nature of what is said; and suppose it be not injurious, yet truth is violated, and that is sinful, though another sin, that of doing injury, is not added to it. In like manner habits of drinking, yet stopping short of actual intoxication, are contracted, and men do not feel the accusing voice of conscience even when they indulge themselves

to the ruin of their health and the injury of their families. Habits of deceit in a person's common transactions and dealings with other men are also acquired, and conscience in a little time rests very quietly under them. It is but too true that much of the common intercourse between man and man will not bear strict inquiry. And there is likewise another deception when people suppose they are living in the same way and walking in the same steps as they observe other persons in their situation; but there is deceit in this; we do not know how other persons live; their secret good as well as evil may be unknown to us, and they may be more pious and devout than we are aware of; but suppose not, still they are not to be our examples. Our way is pointed out for us in the word of God. We may be encouraged to do good by a virtuous person, and warned of evil by the transgressions of the more sinful, but our rule and example is in the words and commandments of our Lord and Redeemer. Let us then contend against these habits of evil that so quietly steal upon us, and make useless the governing principle of our conscience. When death approaches, almost every one passes through some kind of trial, some self-accusation. Sins, even the long-forgotten sins, then present themselves, and in some cases cause alarm and terror,—and why? They would not, if we did, as St. Paul, that is, "die

daily;" for then we should be accustomed to all the preparation for death; and what is the preparation but so to live with respect to our sins and sinful habits and inclinations, as if every day was the one we were to die in—die daily, or, in other words, prepare for death ?

The third cause for the errors of our conscience, and the last which I shall now dwell upon, is the false judgment which we so often make of the sins of omission, and what naturally follows a want of spiritual improvement. Even in persons who do attend, though perhaps not sufficiently, to conscientious feeling, we too often find an entire forgetfulness of this duty of the soul's improvement; but in the progress of a Christian it is not sufficient that he shuns the way of unrighteousness, but that he proceeds and advances in the way that leadeth to the life everlasting. Not only that he denies his evil and corrupt affections, but that he daily proceeds in all virtue and godliness of living, and yet, though oftentimes admonished on this head in the sacred writings, still men do not feel this want of improvement as an actual transgression, and their consciences are too often silent on the subject. They do sometimes lament the doing that which they ought not to have done, but they forget how often the things that should be done they have neglected to do. But what saith our divine Teacher upon this duty of

working in the vineyard of our Lord ? Our's is not an idle calling; and why should we abstain from vice but that we may have hearts and minds at leisure, and in freedom to follow after that which is good ? Why were the talents given but to be improved ? He who returned it again as he received it was punished; and he who increased that with which he was trusted had the reward of his diligence. We can estimate our worldly wealth, and know if it be more or less than at a former period, but we can, in too many instances, go on year after year, and yet not know, not reflect, not weigh and duly consider, whether our faith be more firmly grounded, our hope more exalted and brighter, and our charity burn more like the charity of St. Paul, by fitting us for the state our hope aspireth to.

Our Lord compareth the effect of religion, his religion upon our minds, to the operation of leaven, which ceaseth not to exert its power on the mass till the whole is leavened. This also shows the necessity of improvement, and yet needful as it is, how few comparatively speaking are anxious to learn the measure of their improvement; or indeed to inquire whether they are improved or not. Thus it is, brethren, that the conscience becomes unfitted for its great office, the discovering to ourselves what we truly are; for in whomsoever there is that neglect of frequent and full inquiry; in

whomsoever is that easy admission of sinful habits, though the sins be not of the more alarming description, and in whomsoever dwells that unconcern and thoughtlessness of improvement;—in these there is no right, no conscientious feeling. The mind, like the mirror that is stained and sullied with impurities, yields no just reflection, nor can assist us in beholding ourselves as we truly are.

Having thus stated those things which I conceive to be the causes why men lose the blessing of a pure conscience and one void of offence, I ask your most serious attention to the subject which has been laid before you. It is a benefit so great, a treasure of such inestimable worth, to have a conscience always void of offence both towards God and towards man, that I think none of us who are accustomed to reflect on things present, and things to come, would willingly live without it, would consent to lose a guide so useful, a monitor so just, a comforter when we are most afflicted, and a friend when the world and its friends have forsaken us, as is a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. What men generally want, is, that liveliness and tenderness of conscience that makes them sensible when they have done that which they ought not to have done, or spoken that which has been or may be injurious to another, or is unbecoming in

the speaker. No one can have a conscience void of offence who has not often examined and reprobred himself. There are so many things by which we offend against God or man, or our own souls, that carelessness in this respect is not only sinful, but the occasion of sin. We must not be careless, and then think we are easy and have nothing to disturb us. Cleanse thou me from my secret faults, said the psalmist, and there will be some secret to us, even in the most careful; but we must not lead such a careless life as to have all our faults secret. We must pray for the direction and guidance of him who seeth all things, and from whom none of our sins and offences can be hidden. A lively faith, a devout spirit, and a tender conscience, will preserve us in the trials and temptations which continually assail us, and therefore it is the first part and duty of a Christian in this time of probation to look strictly and earnestly into these great preservatives of the soul; faith stedfast and immoveable, piety that has recourse to prayer, as the great guard against sin, and a conscience always awake, always alive to every impression of good and evil, void of offence towards God and towards man.

SERMON VI.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WICKED.

PSALM ix. 17.

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations
that forget God.”

THE general consent of all nations, the answer of every man’s conscience, and the express revelation of God Almighty agree in this, that there is a judgment hereafter, and a punishment for wicked, unrepenting, and unbelieving persons in the world to come. It is, therefore, above all things necessary that we should know whether we be in the number of those persons, and not deceive ourselves in such an important concern. I will therefore endeavour to describe what is here meant by wickedness in its various degrees and stages; and if you fear a resemblance with your own bosom, you will readily listen to the call of

repentance. We will then consider what it is to forget God, and I think you will find that many forget him who think they remember him.

First, I am to explain who the wicked are. Now of some men there can be no doubt, wherever society is numerous, there will be some among them who are openly abandoned and given over to evil, who either make a mock at sin, or at least despise the voice of truth and the commandments of God. Such are the blasphemers, the sabbath-breakers, the cruel and unjust, who steal and plunder, who habitually lie and deceive, those who are bad parents, husbands or wives, and make all about them, as far as they can, wretched and wicked like themselves; these condemn *themselves*, by their evil doings, in the sight of all men; these are prodigals in a very far country, and we fear reasonably that they will never return; they are like the dry bones in the valley of the prophet, and it is, as it were, by miracle if they live again. Men of this wicked and reprobate kind do indeed, in their latter end, sometimes think of the judgment of the life to come, and in this case they perhaps send for some minister of God's word, more in many instances, it is to be feared, to give them comfort than instruction. In all such cases, ministers can honestly give but little comfort, they can only tell them to repent truly, to make amends for the wrongs they have done

to others as far as possible, to be truly sorry and sincerely penitent for their countless offences against God, to ask for mercy through the intercession of their Redeemer, and not to fancy they have it because they think they believe and repent; for, as it is then too late to afford any trial, any proof of that belief and repentance ; no minister can give unconditional hope, for how can he tell if a man repent till “he do works meet for repentance,” and how can he do works when he is at the point of death? This is, you may think, a hard doctrine, but if so, avoid, I beseech you, the danger that lies in its truth, for if you lead such a life, I think that no minister can honestly give any more hope than this. Some, however, are found, who do feel confident and assured under these circumstances; they lay hold, they say, on their Saviour’s purchase of eternal life; they call up faith in his blood and the promise of remission of sins to such as rely, to such as rest upon this salvation, and assert that they feel the peace that this pardon ensures. This false security may bring more present comfort than the bitter tears of godly sorrow, but can it be trusted ? Is the foundation sure ? The promise of the gospel is to faith, on repentance; the promise to repentance, when sin is forsaken ; but in such cases, it is not the sinner forsaking sin, but death terminating both. Men may die easy who have lived repro-

bate, and to awaken their fears may seem harsh and unchristian; but whether is it better to give men fears, or feed false hopes ; if their fears be false, they are soon over ; if their *hope* be false, they are lost for ever. The beautiful petition in our Liturgy, “ Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, grant us *thy* peace,” is a plain acknowledgment that we are in danger of receiving a peace which flows not from the Saviour of sinners. We hear or read of the most grievous offenders against the laws of God and man, robbers by profession, hardened, guilty of the most atrocious violations against the property and even lives of their fellow creatures, yet with a prospect of almost immediate death before them—that they have felt this call to repentance, and, as they believe, have obeyed it; being changed mercifully and miraculously from the most grievous of sinners, and become not only repenting, but assured of pardon and a place with the children of light. And shall we object to *their* hope and assurance? We dare not; but God only knoweth on what foundation it rests. Next to these, the openly abandoned, are another kind of wicked, who are under the habit and dominion of one particular sin, but in other respects may be decent and even praiseworthy. The covetous are of this kind, who live, nevertheless, in good repute, nay, perhaps, scrupulously, but they are wholly heart and soul given over to mammon—some worldly advantage,

and prefer it to everything besides. The drunkard is also of these, though he may have this only vice, and be otherwise generous, charitable, and just. The gamester likewise, and those who live in any forbidden pleasure, though persons of strict integrity and honour in other respects, are numbered with the wicked. The liar also and slanderer, and, in short, he who allows himself in the practice of any one sin, though very cautious to avoid others, cannot by all his caution escape this sentence—he is one of the wicked. This, too, may seem a hard doctrine, but we are not so much to consider whether what we preach be pleasant or painful, as whether it be false or true. That this doctrine is true, witness St. James: “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in *one* point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.” Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. This, then, is sufficient to show us that one kind of sin, habitual and persisted in, is sufficient for our condemnation, it is rebellion ; it proceedeth from evil, and is the corrupt fruit of the tree which is corrupt. Beware, therefore, of *one* sin; do not make, as it were, an agreement with your conscience, and promise yourselves to be religious in many respects, so that you may indulge in something: you cannot do more than your duty in anything, and therefore what you do rightly *cannot excuse* what

you do wrong. But you may say, Will not God for our Redeemer's sake pardon one act of sin? Surely, if we truly repent. But we are not speaking of one act of sin, but of the habit, or allowance of one sin, which is very different, and remember, few acts will make a habit; any sin whatever, is committed with less reluctance a second time than a first, and is harder to be repented of; it is more willingly yet a third time, than the second, and the work of repentance still more difficult; and now it begins to be a habit; many excuses are made for repeating it—many delays are made in amendment; the struggle of conscience grows fainter and the power of temptation stronger, till the soul is ensnared in the practice, and one sinful action then becomes a habit of sinning. Where the root is bitter, and there is not the graft of truth, the question is not so much what quantity it brings forth, but of what nature and kind. But admit even a habit of one sin—nay, of many—there is, you say, pardon in the mercy of God through Christ. Assuredly there is; full pardon for the past, and promise in the future assistance of grace and the glad hope of final salvation. All this is yours, when you repent and believe the gospel, when you cast off the works of darkness and take on you the armour of light—when you pray for grace and diligently use it,—*when* we do these things, all these hopes and promises relate to us;

but how can a person on his death-bed be said to give up or forsake any habit of sin? the sin forsakes him.

I have now described two kinds of wicked persons; those notoriously guilty of many sins, and those presumptuously living in the habit of one; to these we must add a third. You have read St. Paul's description of charity, without which, even if a man had all knowledge and language, all prophecy and faith so that he could remove mountains, he would be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal that is good for nothing. The uncharitable, therefore, must be reckoned among the wicked. These are hard-hearted, cruel, selfish, and unkind; they bear nothing patiently themselves, and yet they make others suffer; they are proud and revengeful, they resent injuries and exact homage. These, or most of these things the uncharitable do, and though by them they may not transgress any positive law of man, or obtain any grievous evil report, yet they are in the number of the wicked, and rebel against the repeated commandment of their God; for theirs is a spirit quite contrary to the Spirit of Christ, and his meek and humbling religion. You will see men, not unfrequently, to whose charge you can lay no particular crime, who have this uncharitableness, this unkindness, and want of brotherly love; but from this only, they become almost the enemies of man-

kind; they are tyrants and torments in their families, uncourteous to their superiors, unpitiful to those below them, and unfriendly with all around them. Our Saviour has told us who are the blessed on earth, and we find them just the opposites of these men. “Blessed,” saith our Lord, “are the meek, the pitiful, the patient, the peacemakers,” all who have that temper and spirit so different from the hard and unkind; therefore if you do not forgive men, and love them—if you be impatient and uncontrollable—if you make your friends or family uncomfortable or unhappy—if you disdain the poorest of your fellow-creatures, and make much of yourself, because of such a spirit, it is quite inconsistent with the christian character. Such are not the patient, the meek, the mild, the courteous, who are blessed, but the uncharitable, who must repent and pray for a new heart and a new spirit. Such are the wicked.

I will now speak of those who forget God—not entirely forget him, indeed, for that none of us can, who see daily his mighty works and hear weekly at least his holy word; but notwithstanding this, many may and do forget their God, in that sense which will, I fear, rank them with the wicked in their condemnation. First, they forget the majesty of God, his great power and absolute rule over men, who neither give him praise for his almighty and infinite power and wisdom, nor yet

stand in awe of his sovereign rule and eternal justice. The holy men of old were used to call upon even inanimate creatures to praise God; that is, to show forth his glory. Praise him, said they, all his works, fire and hail, wind and storm fulfilling his word. "Praise him, sun and moon, praise him all ye stars of light;" "for his name only is excellent, and his dominion endureth throughout all ages." How can they be said to remember him who do not in daily prayer lift up their hearts to him, nor praise him, nor reverence his name? and such are wicked men who forget their God. 2ndly. They forget, also, the justice of God as well as his power, and do not confess before him with penitent and contrite hearts the sins they have committed and continue to commit. This forgetfulness is presumption, a spirit of pride, with forgetfulness, that will not fear the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. They do not consider how God knows every thought, word, and work, every secret work, every wicked purpose, every vain and criminal desire or act; neither do they reflect how many of these they allow and commit. We well know that there is no one who sinneth not, but then the godly confess their sins, remember them, resolve and guard against them; are sorry for all they have done amiss, and seek for grace to assist and ultimately overcome them; there is in them a new truth and ingrafted spirit, and the evil is thrown off and overcome.

3rdly. These persons forget to pray ; for they neither study themselves to know what things they have need of, nor think of the power and will of God to give them; in the morning they rise to their business, at night they retire to their rest; all day long they live, and move, and have their being by God's permission, and yet morning, noon, and night pass away without thinking who it is that protects them, and without wishing for his protection.

4thly. They are those who ungratefully forget his mercies, our very birth and being, our food and sustenance, our preservation from evil, our deliverance from danger; all our hopes, our comforts, our present good, and our future expectations God has given us ; and shall we give him no thanks, no acknowledgment for all his benefits which he hath done unto us? Are they not ungrateful and wicked who do not ? Can they who do so—who live so—expect continuance of his blessing in this life? Can they hope to escape punishment in another?

I have now endeavoured to describe to you the wicked, according to the meaning of this fearful and warning passage, viz., those guilty of many and notorious sins, those indulging themselves in any sinful habit, and the uncharitable and hard of heart; also those who are forgetful of God, viz., those who do not praise him and reverence his

holy name—who do not confess to him and repent of their sins—who do not pray to him for his blessing and protection—and who are not thankful for his benefits and mercies,—who, in fact, have not that spirit which would lead and direct them in all their ways. I have now to entreat you, not to be of this number; if you have been or are such, repent, before it is too late. God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. He hath given his Son for us, and he is the sacrifice for sins if we repent and truly turn to him; therefore let us not presume to hope that Christ is the sacrifice for our sins in particular, till our own particular faith and repentance make him so. He is indeed the sacrifice for the sins of the *whole world*; but the salvation of all those, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, who cast off their evil ways, calling upon his name and trusting in his satisfaction. This is the religion which is both reasonable and comfortable; for nothing can be more unreasonable than to expect to live all our life in sin and forgetfulness of God, and then when we come to die imagine that the visit of a minister, the discourse of a friend, or the reading of a book, is to pave our way to heaven.

To prevent false hopes, therefore, when you come to die—to prevent tears and despair also, and what, if possible, is worse than either, to pre-

vent a cold, dead, miserable heart, think seriously, repent truly, and lead a new, holy, and obedient life, that so, yours may be the death of the righteous, and your latter end like his—an end that is peace, with the promise of joy; where death has no sting, where the grave has no victory, but the soul, triumphing over the ruins of the body, looks for immortality, glory, and everlasting happiness.

SERMON VII.

NO PEACE TO THE WICKED.

ISAIAH lvii. 21.

“ There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

THAT we may the better understand and the more readily agree to this declaration, and more especially that we may be profited by the fact, we should learn *who* are those wicked persons on whom the prophet denounces this judgment, and what is *that peace* of which they cannot be partakers. Now it is plain to the most common understanding that when we speak of good men we do not mean those who perform some occasional acts of virtue, who are at some times kind, forbearing, and just, or who are moved to any transitory desires for the advantage of their fellow-creatures, or to some acts of piety for the benefit of their own souls. Not these ; but we call those good,

and those alone, who live in a uniform and habitual desire to do that which is lawful and right, who are penitent for every sinful word and work that they are led by the frailty of their nature to utter or perform. In fact, they are not good by chance or by force, but in conformity with the precepts of the gospel, and that change which has been wrought in them by the Holy Spirit purifying and softening their hearts ; those whose repentance has led them to renounce and forsake all habitual sin ; and whose faith brings forth in them good fruits, obedience to God, and peace and joy in themselves.

Opposite to these are the wicked; they are not such as through the strength of temptation, or the frailty of nature, commit occasional acts of deeply repented sin—acts never by frequency wrought into habit : neither are they those who in the great warfare betwixt duty and inclination are sometimes overthrown ; but the wicked are followers and lovers of wickedness ; those whose *habits* are evil, and whose hearts are perverted by false opinions and debased by vicious propensities —who either make a mock at sin, or are hardened by the practice of it—whose best deeds are *accidental*, and whose notions are worldly and selfish ; they are those to whom religion is an enemy, and therefore they are always in fact, and sometimes in profession, enemies to religion, ridiculing its

precepts and denying its principles,—in fact, the wicked are they who obey the suggestions of a depraved inclination, a vitiated appetite, or are the servants of sin and mammon in any of its forms. The wicked as the good are, to be found in every class of mankind, and every station of life;—among the rich and poor, the busy and unoccupied, the ignorant and learned; and though the depravity of man must appear in different ways, yet there can be no doubt of the evil nor (happily we can add) of the good ; of evil which neither the palace nor cottage can exclude, which neither business nor repose have been found to banish, which the most ignorant have been taught to embrace, and the most learned have not been wise enough to expel. There may be places, and professions, more or less favourable, to good and evil, but *mere* good and evil have been found in every one of them. But though all these may go astray in different modes and manners, yet they are all so far alike, that they sin against the light of their own reason, the commandments of God, and the purity of the gospel. The wickedness of him “ who lurks in the thievish corner of the streets,” and robs the passenger of the means by which he lives and sometimes of his life, is certainly very unlike that, him who seduces the virtue of the innocent, or corrupts the manners of the simple; the sin of the usurer is of one kind, and that of the profligate

another. The daring and impious man who ridicules all that is serious, and attacks the religion which is the honour of his country, to wound the peace of those who rely upon it, is very unlike, in mere outward appearance, the craft and subtlety of him who takes every advantage and every opportunity to gain at the expense of the unwary and the needy; who either rely on his integrity, or are forced by circumstances on his mercy; but in principle, or rather want of principle, they are just the same. The wicked, then, of whatever class and kind they may be, are those who seek the gratification of their own passions, wishes, and inclinations, without regarding the opposition of laws human or divine, if they can evade the one, or escape the infamy which attends any gross violation of the other; and we too well know that men may be exceedingly wicked, without being liable to either the arm of the law or the cry of shame. To point out the wicked personally could not be done, except in gross and palpable offenders; in other cases we are liable to err; their sins must in general be left to their own conscience, except, as I say, where the arm of justice or the common sense and feeling of mankind palpably show the sinner to his fellow-creatures and to himself; but these are punishments which evil men reserved for greater, oftentimes, nay, generally, escape; and the few of them who are

brought to public condemnation or are notoriously and openly characterized as enemies to their fellow-creatures, are only such as rather serve for examples of what *all* the wicked deserve, and shadow forth in some feeble degree that punishment which none of them can finally escape. But though we cannot say that wicked persons who break the laws of man are all punished by the justice of man, much less that those who break the commandments of God, and who violate the precepts of the gospel, are either despised or put to open shame, yet we are assured that they do not escape even in this part of their existence, *some* of the evil that is attendant upon sin; for as the righteous amid all their afflictions and temptations have a secret and assuring comfort in their hearts, “a peace that passeth understanding”—so the wicked, in all their joys, triumphs, and exaltation, have, sooner or later, their weight and measure of retribution, if not always by the answer of a wounded spirit, yet by the absence of an approving conscience. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

What that peace is we proceed to describe: it is not that thoughtless quiet and repose of spirit, which some even among very wicked persons for a time possess. Conscience is not always awake, and in many slumbers till a late period in life. The attacks of conscience, it is well known, are

frequently caused by distress and sudden calamity, by sickness and sorrow; and while these do not afflict them, wicked men are often able to cast off every conscientious reflection, and every painful thought that occasionally obtrudes itself. Nor is it that peace which is transient and sudden—which is not a resource, but an accident—which comes, we know not how, nor remains with us. It is not to be denied that holy men have joys in their devotions and in their meditations, and are at times more abundantly happy; but the peace of which I am speaking is rather an assurance of the divine favour, than the emotions of a lively and joyful spirit. Neither by peace is meant that even tide of prosperity or that happiness which many persons enjoy, who are neither thoughtful whence it arises, nor thankful for it when it comes. In many passages of the psalms is this flourishing state of wicked men noticed, but not as a state of peace; the joys and triumphs of the wicked have always more of the tempest than the calm, for how can the wicked have peace whose happiness is at the mercy of an hour? Take the most favourable circumstances, and apparently the most lasting; those of a young healthy man surrounded by his family and acquaintances and thriving in his business; dividing his time between the active pursuit of wealth and the enjoyment of all those pleasures of life which his money

can purchase. Here is youth, health, and prosperity,—life can give no more, nor give a better prospect of continuance. Here may be for a time much pleasure, but no peace. The man in the midst of this enjoyment feels that he is liable at any time to various calamities, any one of which would make him miserable; and though he may seldom reflect on the liability, there is at all times a feeling of insecurity that is quite inconsistent with peace. For a time all these prosperous circumstances may continue; but who except those that *die instantly* in the full tide of prosperity can escape some of the calamities of life? and to the wicked such kind of escape would be the worst calamity of all. Some ills of life are sure to occur sooner or later. Suppose that he meets with that reverse in circumstances which thousands experience, and is at once deprived of all comforts and superfluities, and reduced to the bare necessities of life, and obliged to work at some new and hard employment to procure them. Can that man (if he is not under the influence of vital religion) have peace? Where is it to come from? He is one, therefore, whether in prosperity or adversity, who, according to the preceding definition, must be classed with the wicked. There can be no peace for him under such reverses; the residue of such a life is often passed either in the desperate resource of intoxication or with a repining

and irritable spirit; or instead of the loss of property, does he meet with the loss of health? this may occur to the most apparently strong in one day; some fatal disorder may fasten on some vital part, and there may be no probability, no hope of a cure. What is all his wealth to that man? Money can only be valuable in order to procure the means of enjoyment; here the very source of all worldly enjoyment is cut off—a painful disease ending only in the grave. Where is the peace of the wicked under such afflictions? Or it scarcely alters the case if this fatal disorder should seize upon one of his family, (for those who forget God and their duty have very strong attachments to their earthly connexions, nay, may even idolize them). It may be perhaps said in this case, that time may soften or obliterate the suffering; but may not time double it, and some other of his near connexions be torn from him? Even the probability of such calamities is quite sufficient to banish all peace from such a mind, much more the actual endurance. But if, by an unusual exemption, none of these sorrows overtake the wicked, the time of his own departure must arrive, whether preceded by a long illness or a short and violent one. It is almost needless for me to observe, that amid the confusion of feeling in such a man's mind at such a time, alarm, self-reproach, remorse, terror, despair, there can be no peace.

I have supposed the case of a person of wealth, of fair worldly character, under the most favourable circumstances that can be imagined, yet with all this there can be no peace to the wicked; but if we suppose one under the average mixture of worldly good and ill, and to have lost that which few of the wicked retain altogether unblemished, a good name, the blessed consciousness of peace of mind such an one can never know. I am supposing that there is no effectual change of heart, no true repentance, no real conversion; for wherever that takes place there is even from the first a gleam of that peace, which though it may be “afar off,” is quite bright and heavenly enough to engage the heart to follow after it. Now which is to be chosen,—*that peace*, or such a remaining portion of this world’s enjoyments as your age, station, and means promise you? Supposing that true religion forbids some of those enjoyments, we see the precarious, the tottering state of the very best of them. Are you ready to sacrifice all hope of this peace for such a portion as you can reasonably expect? But if you can have all the real enjoyments of life, the true, the substantial, and the virtuous, and this peace beside, who can hesitate for a moment? Let us examine, then, more attentively the nature of this religious peace, and I think we shall find it harmonize with every real satisfaction of life. That peace which the wicked

cannot have, then, is that which is a lasting, abiding possession of good and faithful men—it is peace that not only bears reflection, but that springs from it, and which, while it is allied to the strongest faith, is confirmed by the soundest reason,—it is the peace of God, the flower of grace, the fruit of saving faith,—it is not merely repose of mind and quiet, but the glorious consequence and high privilege of the faithful Christian,—a peace which the accidents and miseries of life may disturb for a time, but cannot destroy, and are afterwards additions to its returning comforts. This peace it is which the wicked cannot have, indeed they cannot conceive, but it is promised to all that seek for it with sincere minds and obedient hearts; but there must be no deceit in the spirit; it is only given to those who approve themselves upright and sincere, “Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace;” and it is said, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee;” and, in fact, the more steady the faith of a believer, and the more holy his life, so much more divine and comfortable is this peace of the soul; the blessings of this peace, which is beyond any other gift, can only be understood by those who possess it, but it may be so far appreciated even by others as to become an object of desire. There are many who so feel the want

as to wish for that Spirit which is peaceable and pure. To all those that aspire to this blessing is a promise given, that they shall possess it, if they will enter upon and persevere in the right way. You know from whence come grace and truth, and to whom you have access by faith. You know that this grace of God bringeth salvation, and that you are taught by it to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world. Other foundation can no man lay; if you would have this peace you must have this grace—faith in the Lord your Redeemer, and the righteousness and holiness which are the fruit of it. “This is the true grace of God wherein we stand.” This divine peace, therefore, springs from the faith and practice of the true Christian; it is his assurance, his trust, his inheritance, his triumph; and it is, I might add, his armour and defence, his support and comfort, for there is no situation in which man can possibly be placed, wherein he finds not that peace which the world cannot give, more than a compensation for everything which it can take away. The world has not a blessing to compare with it, though it has a thousand temptations and seductions which prevent our seeking, and draw us aside when we have in some degree sought it. If it be asked more particularly what this peace is, we reply, it is, in one word, realizing the blessings and

promises of the gospel, and therefore it is no wonder that wicked men cannot have it; but were they for a moment convinced of its effects, even they *must* desire it,—the peace of God is that which lightens every affliction, and extinguishes every fear; it perpetually brings to the soul the strong and lively prospect of salvation, of a future state of blessing and glory; so that when the weakness of our nature begins to give way, and we feel the impression of outward circumstances, injuries, losses, disappointments, vexations, then the trust we have in the mercies and promises of the new covenant, our faith in the resurrection of our Lord and Redeemer, and our hope that where he is we shall be also, the confidence that we possess that God is true and that his truth has been made manifest to us, and the boundless scene of glory and greatness represented to us, both by reason and faith—reason that relies on the evidence of the gospel, and faith that reposes on the assurances of the Redeemer. All these unite in forming that peace which surpasses the understanding, but contradicts it not; that peace which places the Christian above the things of the world, and yet does not make them indifferent to him, inasmuch as they are the occasions for his duties and the instruments of his obedience—that peace which gives a tenfold interest to all that is good and valuable in the world, because it extends our

love for these to a boundless eternity, while it teaches us to look on our daily misfortunes, our troubles, and vexations, as things of the moment, and only trials for patience and resignation. If this life were *all*, the troubles and miseries of it bear, indeed, a formidable proportion to all the comforts that man can possess, and overbalance beyond comparison the isolated seasons of gladness and joy; but let the future be taken into the account, and the proportion of evil sinks to nothing, but is utterly lost in a glorious futurity. For a blessing so great as this peace let us all strive: "My peace I leave with you," saith our blessed Master; seek it on all occasions,—seek it in trials, troubles, and disappointments; seek it by prayer and meditation; by a correction of the evil within, and a guard on the seductions without: above all, seek it by reliance on the mercies of the Redeemer, and faith in his blood: this is the only way to that peace which passeth understanding, which every one who seeketh in sincerity will assuredly to his joy and confirmation of hope find. There is certainly nothing in this life that can repay us for the loss of this peace; and consider, the longer we live, the more we must feel the want of it, because all other comforts, one after another, fail us. The attachment of friends we cannot always depend on; our cotemporaries have their own afflictions, and want their own con-

solations. All have their own pursuits, and few, if any, can enter into our feelings, the solicitudes of our own bosom, or contribute to our relief. The pleasures of the senses are all liable to decay, and if they remain as long as life lasts, and also the means to indulge them, what a poor, sensual, and degrading kind of happiness to a creature, rational and formed for immortality ! Be assured the world cannot give that peace, nor an equivalent for it: but the gospel *can*, and the faith that reposes in the divine promise, and relies on the covenant of mercy, can and will infallibly give the soul that inward rest which no outward trouble can long or finally disturb. This happiness is not a fanciful exultation of the spirits ; it is not enthusiasm, but arises from a reasonable, sober conviction, that after these few years of probation in this unequal and (as it appears to some) *confused* scene of existence, there will be another state, another life, one of perfect peace, where goodness is not left struggling with adversity, and where wickedness is not suffered to exist.

SERMON VIII.

ARE THERE FEW THAT BE SAVED ?

LUKE xiii. 23.

"Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved ? and he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

IT is evident from this reply, that our Lord did not mean to answer the question put to him; nor after this reply would it become us to inquire into the number of those, the happy and chosen servants of the Lord, who shall enter into his joy, and be partakers of his glory. But though the number of these, the children of the kingdom, or of the rejected, must not be inquired into, it is not only allowable, but it is incumbent on us, and is our duty, to learn what kind of persons they are, who shall on the day of judgment be placed on the right hand and on the left, who shall be admitted into the mansions of glory, or who shall

be excluded and thrust out into darkness, the dwellings of sin and sorrow, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And let us recollect that we know of no other than those who are on the right hand or on the left—the received or the condemned. What it may please the all-wise and merciful Judge to do with respect to those who know not, or who could not know of his holy will and commandments, with those void of understanding, with the utterly ignorant, it becomes us to be utterly submissive in our judgment.

As we must be completely ignorant of the divine dispensation, we may rest assured that the Judge of all the earth will do that which is righteous and just, and may cease from all further inquiry. But with respect to ourselves, to all who have heard the glad tidings of the gospel, who have learned what Christianity is, that new covenant of grace and mercy—to us is revealed those important truths which inform us what is the will of God, and teach us how to live in obedience to, and conformity with it. What is it that we are taught from our youth, nay, what is impressed upon us in our very childhood, that it may dwell with us as most essential to our safety in a state of trial, and to our happiness in a state hereafter ? Are not *these* truths ? 1st. Forgiveness of sins through faith in our Redeemer. 2nd. Repentance of all that we have done amiss. And 3rd.

A new birth unto righteousness, that our lives may be answerable to our profession ; for without faith in the Saviour we have no promise, nor well-grounded hope of forgiveness; without repentance we have no assurance nor proof of faith: they who believe truly, do repent sincerely ; and without that holy and christian life, that new birth unto righteousness, we have no solid ground for our hopes to rest upon; our house is not built upon the rock, for “ if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” Faith, repentance, and reformation of life, are the three marks of true conversion, and for these we should strive as our Lord has commanded; not inquiring if few or many are to be saved, but earnestly endeavouring to ensure our own salvation. Our Lord did not answer questions which were dictated by curiosity, and led to no beneficial purpose. When Peter asked him, Lord, and what shall this man do ? meaning St. John, his Lord replied, “ If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? follow thou me.” Many things we may be anxious to know, but they are hidden from us; there is sufficient, there is all that is requisite for our conduct in this life, and our happiness in a life to come. More than this would probably be an hindrance rather than a help, and gratify our thirst of knowledge at the hazard of our temporal peace, and, it may be, our eternal salvation. Suppose our divine teacher had

answered the question, and told his disciples whether few or many would be saved; curiosity would not have ended there; then would some have probably inquired concerning the manner of salvation, the degree of happiness, the states of greater or less offenders, how they would fare who knew not that the Saviour came into the world, that the world through him might be redeemed from sin; or what would be the lot of the voluntary ignorant who sought not the way of salvation, or that of improvident, negligent, and worldly minds, who live without a care, or even thought for their souls; of the future state of these, and numberless of human beings more or less devoted to the pleasures, pursuits, and all the engagements and entanglements of this world of trial, of the mansions of which our Lord has told us there are many.

Over these, and all that the mind of man contemplates with awe and hope, or with anxiety and terror, a veil is cast which may not be withdrawn; hope we may, and fear we must, but certainly as respects these things, we cannot know, till the things of the world shall pass away, and time and trial shall be no more. Let us not then busy ourselves, and weary our minds in vain research after knowledge that cannot be obtained; let us not inquire whether many shall be saved or few, nor look to be informed what are the mansions of glorified spirits, what are appointed for the ignorant or others: *our way is pointed out to us, our duty*

is assigned; we are to strive in this life for the happiness of a life to come, by faith in the Saviour of the world, by repentance for all that we have done amiss, and by a new birth unto righteousness, being just and charitable in all that relates to man, pure and temperate in all our enjoyments, and in meekness, humility, and earnestness, serving our God.

There are many other subjects which may lawfully and laudably engage our thoughts, and are the proper subjects of our inquiry; and there are the Holy Scriptures open, that in the darker ages and times of papal usurpation were denied to the members of the church, who were forbidden to read them, and therefore could not mark, learn, nor inwardly digest them; they might indeed boast that they were all of one mind, for how could it be otherwise? because in the dark we are all of one colour: but by reason of sin there is no unmixed good to men in this sinful world. When the Reformation opened the Bible for all who were disposed for so interesting a study, many read and were profited, many read and were confused; to some it was the savour of life unto life, to others of death unto death. Some pretended to have found doctrines which were but the fruit of their own fancies, and while there were those who were sober and judicious, others were led away from all the sobriety of truth and reason, into strange and visionary opinions, taking

the fanciful interpretations of men for the revelation and commandments of God. Hence arose various sects and extravagant doctrines, and many, instead of seeking for the assistance of the Spirit of God (which is so freely promised to all that ask for it) to guide them into all truth, became vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise they became fools; the light that was in them was darkness, and how great was that darkness ! Still, there were found some, who came in an humble and teachable spirit, to learn the will of God in his revealed word, and to such, it became a light, to light their feet into the way of peace; these, through faith in their Redeemer, obeyed his precepts, and received the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.

But let us attend to the admonition of our heavenly Father—"Strive to enter into the strait gate," that is, let us endeavour with all our heart, mind, and strength, to become the true followers of our gracious Lord, and to ensure our eternal salvation ; the way is strait, and therefore requires our most serious purpose and our continual care; but this way leads to everlasting happiness, and must not be sought (for it cannot be found) by a slow, careless, indifferent spirit. Are we not told that such is the happiness, that the eye of man hath not seen it, nor can see, nor his ear hear, nor

his heart conceive, the things that God hath prepared for those who love him ? Who would not strive for this ? who would not diligently inquire how it may be obtained ? I have said how it is to be sought and obtained—by a sincere and unshaken faith in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; a true repentance for the sins, offences, errors, and frailties of our past life; an holy purpose and resolution to live as believers in the gospel of our Lord and Redeemer; an habitual obedience to his divine precepts, praying for that assisting grace which will not be denied to the supplications of the penitent and the humble, the holy in purpose and the pure in heart, nor to those who sincerely desire to become such. This is not a life of pain, austerity, and fear. Who so happy as he who strives for the happiness of a life to come ? He cannot be disappointed. We are not forbidden to seek the good of this life, provided we do not make it our first and greatest object—provided we do not endeavour to serve two masters. But even in our lawful pursuit of worldly good, there are these things against us, first, that we may not acquire the object of our pursuit; and secondly, if we do acquire it, we may find that we have mistaken our interest, and though we have gained the object of our pursuit, it does not bring us the happiness we expected from it; for if it did, then rich men and great,

wise men and learned, men of knowledge and skill, would be *all* happy, and the comparatively poor and needy, the simple and uninformed, those who labour for food and toil for rest, would be miserable; and yet neither of these results are true. But whoever of them, in either situation, or in any, seeketh first and earnestly the kingdom of God and his righteousness, seeketh *that* happiness in the attainment of which he will *not* be disappointed. It is not easy for us to determine what situation of life has most of happiness or least of trouble. Will it be said that the poor labouring man, who wants much, has most of distress ? Let us compare his lot with that of the luxurious rich man, who has fed his diseases till his days are without comfort, and his nights know no repose. Who shall decide which is the happier condition, that of the man of great talents, who, after much study and many trials, has accomplished the very object of his ambition, or the simple man's quiet, who never wearied himself with a thought on the subject ?

We may depend on it, our situations in life are more equal, more accurately balanced than we oftentimes suppose them to be; the great and essential difference is between those who strive, and those who do not strive, for that happiness which the world cannot give; and to this may be added an important truth, that the strife for this

happiness in a world to come, is so far from depriving us of the real good of this world, that it adds to every pleasure we may innocently enjoy, and takes from every care, trouble, and affliction, that flesh is heir to. Whether there be many, comparatively speaking, to be saved, or considering the inconceivable multitude of human beings, whether there be few,—what are the mansions of glory, what the measure and degree of happiness in them, or what the judgment passed on the sinners who had not faith, who did not repent ! What the justice and mercy of the just and merciful God will effect, and how be made manifest in that great day for which the Lord had commanded us to be prepared—all these are subjects for our veneration and godly fear; but they are beyond our knowledge, and while they excite in us the strongest motives for our obedience, are beyond the reach of our understanding. The great and all-interesting day of judgment, and the destination of all human beings in a future state, are subjects upon which it would be presumption in us to reason, or to suppose that we can enter into the secret counsels of the Ruler and Lord of all worlds, and all that live and move therein.

But while these things surpass our comprehension, they demand our reverence, and should awake in us the most lively hope, or the most awful fear, as our faith lies, or has not worked in us effectually.

Can we indeed believe that we shall be judged, and yet not strive, that we may find mercy ? Can we rely upon the mercy of our Redeemer, and yet not live in obedience to his laws ? It was asked, Lord, are there few that be saved ? Had he answered, Few, would not this have led the timid Christian to despair ? And had the answer been, Many, numbers might have been encouraged to presume ; but the Lord said unto him who inquired, “ Strive.” The most fearful may, therefore, know that salvation *may* be attained, and the most confident may learn that it cannot be attained without strife—without faith in the Redeemer, and obedience to his holy word—without piety, charity, and resistance of sin.

SERMON IX.

THE SLEEPER.

1 THESS. v. 6.

“Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober.”

ST. PAUL was himself ever watchful, ever attentive to that which was committed to him, “the care of all the churches” which, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, he had established among the Gentiles. No one can doubt the zeal of St. Paul, the faithful servant of his divine Master, who became all things to all men, that he might gain some. What he did, and what he suffered, are they not written in his Epistles, and related in the Acts of the Apostles? and they cannot be unknown to any of us who read with even moderate attention those records of holy writ. Now this zeal and earnestness which he felt in himself, he earnestly recommends to his converts, and implies that no sincere

Christians can be like persons who sleep, with such works and such views before them, but must be ever awake and watchful in their high and holy calling; nor can we reasonably doubt that what was delivered to them is intended for us likewise. Who can question that it is our duty to be earnest, vigilant, attentive, and not slumber in our christian course, as if we were called to duties of slight importance, and to hopes and fears that could but little concern us, and for a short time. Let us remember what encouragement the same apostle hath given to us, and his solemn words when he had treated at large on the resurrection of the dead: "Therefore, my beloved brethren," said he, "be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." What a manifest difference is there between those who are actuated by this principle of vigilance, and those who heed it not; and this is proved in every act, and more especially in every religious duty which they perform.

You perceive that while some sleep, others watch and are sober, that is, serious and considerate. Let us attend to this difference, that those who sleep may feel the distinction, and awakening, act upon it, and become the faithful vigilant servants of their divine Master—and that all may prepare with more earnest diligence for that great day of

the Lord when we must make up our account of the employment of our time and the improvement of our talents. Observe the vast difference between that vital religion, and the cold habitual devotion of a nominal Christian—or at most, a mere believer in the truth of Christianity—which he vainly imagines is all that is required of him. First observe their different methods of reading the Holy Scriptures. All Christians at some time read their Bible, but those whom St. Paul names the sleepers do this without any purpose, at least, any previous consideration of what they are doing or mean to do, what they are seeking or wish to find. They have heard that reading the word of God is a duty, and they read it. It is to them not material in what part. The books of Moses, the history of the chosen people, what are called by the Hebrews the holy writings and the prophetical books, are all open unto them, with the still more deeply interesting contents of the New Testament, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the epistles of his servants the apostles. In some part of some of these the uninterested reader spends the time allotted to this duty, and when he has finished what is oftentimes a task, he considers himself as one who has been engaged in a necessary but somewhat burdensome employment. He remembers little or nothing; for his purpose was to “read the Scripture.” The reading was the

thing to be done. If any part of it dwelt on his memory, that was more than he thought of when he began to read; in fact, he has given his half hour to his Bible, and perhaps has taken some degree of credit to himself for so long an abstraction of his mind from the other duties or engagements of the day. Not so the Christian: watchful and serious, he has prepared himself for that which he is about to perform; and he either previously purposes to himself what he shall read, and for what purpose, or if he ever reads without an especial choice, whatever portion of Scripture he peruses, he does this with the greatest attention. He takes care to be informed of the meaning, and earnestly seeking for the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, marks, learns, and inwardly digests it. If he read in the Old Testament, he considers it with relation to something in the New; he draws practical inferences from the precepts, and divine consolation and hope from the promises, and with holy fear regards the awful threatening of a righteous God against impenitent sinners. He counts that reading as of little or no use which leads not to the information of the mind or the improvement of the soul. In the Gospels the words of our Lord command his utmost reverence, and the precepts of holiness and piety are engrafted in his memory. The works of mercy fill him with admiration and holy love,

and that one great mercy, the redemption of a sinful world, becomes, as he reads, life to his faith, and strength to his obedience. All is interesting, because, though he has read these things over and over again, yet the impression is made strong by the importance of the subject, and becomes, as it were, new, by the reflections which ever spring afresh from the words and works which so deeply concern his own happiness and that of all mankind.

What has been said of the sacred Scriptures may be spoken of prayer and other religious duties, both public and private. Doubtless there are, in all congregations, those who worship "in the beauty of holiness," in sincerity and truth, and others who, though they do not (like the Jews in the days of our Redeemer) bring their tables of money and their merchandize into the house of God, yet have in their thoughts either these or things of like worldly concern—the business of the day past, or the cares of the morrow. Again, these sleepers of the apostle are but too much accustomed to consider the *sabbath* as, exclusively of other days, dedicated to religion, or rather to the duties which are prescribed to them—public worship and reading the Scriptures; when the day is past, the cares and concerns of the world enter into the heart, (if indeed they were ever excluded even for that one day,) and

the whole mind, with all its faculties and powers, becomes enslaved by the associations of the calling or business which may be urgent and must be attended to, but surely never to the exclusion of man's first and greatest concern. For how does the watchful, the earnest, and faithful servant of his Lord estimate these things ? he gives, and willingly, for he is permitted to give his mind to his worldly concerns, but he does not permit them so to engross his time and faculties as ever to forget that he is a candidate for immortality and glory. There are times when even the busiest may cease from the labour of his mind and body, and may converse with himself and with his God. In the midst of the world's affairs, a sincere believer will find intervals for withdrawing his thoughts from the care of the day, and directing them to the time when that care will be no more.

It is not a favourable sign of the religious state of any when his sabbath-day is so unlike the other six days, when the mind returns to its worldly vacations as a school-boy to his amusements ; and yet this is found in every one who has not tasted the pleasures that true religion affords to the sincere believer. The privileges and duties of the sabbath-day are appointed for the instruction of some, and the devotion of all ; but the Christian is the same with respect to his heart, his inward piety, his devotions in private, and, in fact, in all

he thinks, believes, and hopes, he is the same on every day beside, as on the one appointed for nobler service.

Without entering more minutely into these distinctions, we may observe that a true sense of religion, a lively faith in redeeming love, and a constant desire to live as in the sight of God, will have such effect upon the believer, that he *cannot* for any length of time, *cannot* any day of his life, divest himself of the hope of his soul's salvation ; and where this hope reigns, it must of necessity possess a distinguished place in his heart and affections ; it will in its very nature, as the first concern of his life, become the frequent object of his desires and his prayers. It may not perhaps be easy to distinguish between the nominal Christian who sleepeth and the believer who is awake and attentive to the one thing needful. Nor is it necessary. *We* are not judges of our fellow-sinners, neither, generally speaking, do we approach near enough to discern the secrets of the heart ; but however incapable *we* may be, there is one that seeth and judgeth, and neither of the persons described can be ignorant of the state of his own soul. The bright hopes of the one, and (where he does think) the apprehensions of the other, or his very unwillingness to look accurately into himself, must discover this difference to those who have the least interest in their own souls ;

but if the sleeper does not discover his danger during the period of health and active life, he assuredly will when age comes on with its infirmities. Disease and weakness, they will force him to look (at least at times) from the employments, the cares, and the interests which hitherto have shut out all serious thoughts of the soul's welfare ; then is the sleeper compelled to awake. " Awake thou that sleepest," had *long* been said, but he scarcely knew that he was asleep, and the call was not hearkened to ; but now at this period of life the thought is irresistibly presented to him, and the awful question will force itself into the mind, Am I prepared for death ? he has then perhaps no immediate worldly business which he may turn to, and, by incessant occupation, drive away the answer which he is obliged to give to questions of such importance as these, Is my heart in my duty ? do I feel the believer's hope and love and joy ? am I convinced that my Redeemer liveth, and that he died for me ? have I denied and subjected my evil passions, and my carnal and earthly desires, in obedience to him ? has my prayer for the divine grace and favour been offered with earnestness ? in fact, have I lived as a disciple of my Lord and Saviour, desirous to serve him, and happy to trust in his mercy and forgiveness ?

To all these questions the faithful and true believer

has already answered with sincerity, and rejoices with all humility, that he is enabled to take to himself the comfort that such self-examination affords him ? But what does the sleeper ? he cannot reap this comfort, for he has not *sown* that which produces it; and “ whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;” then if he cannot comfort himself, he will send for one who may assist him in the search for comfort. It is the eleventh hour, and his mind is weak as his body; but still he would not depart without the hope, and, if possible, the assurance of happiness hereafter. And who is to promise this ? or who knoweth upon what foundation it is to be built ?

In some few of such cases we may have reason to hope it may not be too late; but the pain, the difficulty, the bodily infirmity, the loss of time and the want of it, all are vast and fearful impediments in the way of either hope or comfort. All are proofs how dangerous a thing it is to sleep to our *great* interests, and be alive and active in our pursuit of *the less*. A friend or minister may wish to give the hope that he dares not, and how shall he be of effectual service to one who wishes (I repeat) to reap the blessing of a joyful death, when he had not ever seriously entered upon the christian course, not yet set one step in the narrow way that leadeth unto life ? True it may be said, and it is what men naturally will say, “that

it is at no period too late for that call, the time for repentance is not decided. The penitent thief had the promise of mercy, and the prodigal son returned to his father's house; there were those who entered into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, and had the same reward as those who had borne the burden and heat of the day; and if we truly repent, then have we had time sufficient for repentance." These are some of the arguments which the fond hopes and self-love of erring man will find for his consolation. It may appear like cruelty in any one to disturb the repose of his mind in his last days, by reasons of an opposite tendency; but what may appear as cruel to one in that situation, is mercy to those who are in health, and can (by the grace of God) make their calling and election sure, and even unto him it may, by sweeping away his refuge of lies, be the means of fixing his hope on the only true foundation. Let us, then, reflect upon the real nature of that hope which those have who have *slept* during the days of health and opportunity. It is said, "if we truly repent, then have we had time sufficient for repentance." But who shall answer, and how shall we assure ourselves of our repenting truly for sins past, sins forgotten, the errors and transgressions of our youth and of our age? "The time for repentance cannot be determined;" but of this we are certain, it is never *too early*, and it may be *too*

late. The penitent thief had the promise of mercy; he may have obeyed the *first* invitation to repentance, and he who knows all hearts saw that he was sincere. But who among these sleepers has not been called *many* times, and who can discern between true repentance and mere fear when sickness or death are in view? It has been well said, there is one recorded instance of late repentance in Scripture that none may despair, and but one that none may presume. The prodigal son returned to his father's house, but he did not say when dying, "I will arise and go;" he arose and went while he had health and strength for the journey. And if the labourers who entered into the Lord's vineyard at the eleventh hour were rewarded as those who bore the burden and heat of the day, yet be it remembered that they began their labour as soon as they were called to their work. Who among the sleepers in a christian land can be said to do this? We must not have recourse to these dangerous but too common comforts. If whatever be our age, state of health, or other circumstances, any of us have too much reason to think our faith has been dead and our habits unholy; if our affections be fixed on the world and our gratitude for the Redeemer's love and sufferings cold and inoperative; if we have lived in the world, not as strangers and pilgrims, but as its friends and admirers,

with hearts wedded to its pleasures and deluded by its promises ; if such be the awful state of any, let them, without delay, turn away from these lying vanities, and earnestly pray for true repentance. The shorter your time, the more need there is for earnestness of purpose and earnestness in prayer. If you have slept so long, there is the more urgent necessity to awake; let your repentance be sincere, your confession of sin full and without reserve, and your amendment without the allowance of any sin; for “he that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy.” Call to mind what you have done amiss, and your omission of what you ought to have done; and if you do this with sincerity and truth, with deep humility and godly sorrow, you may then, late as it is and grievous as your sins may have been, remember and be thankful that there is this comfort still open, still offered to you, that the Lord our God pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel.

SERMON X.

THE CERTAINTY OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT.

MATT. xxiv. 3.

“ And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be ? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world ?”

THE three evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, have related at some length the discourse of our Saviour to his disciples concerning two very important events, viz., the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world. Of these St. Mark appears to be most particular. Our blessed Lord begins his reply with warning them that false Christs would come and deceive many; that they should be persecuted; that great tribulation should arise; brother betraying brother, and father son. He foretells them that they must be brought before rulers and kings, and some of

them put to death; that there should be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes ; that many false prophets and impostors would arise and deceive many. These, and some other particulars, our Lord foretold concerning the destruction of Jerusalem; and he added, moreover, that all should come to pass before the end of that generation, that is to say, before threescore years.

All this our Saviour seems to have spoken of Jerusalem, and the final destruction of the temple and nation; but concerning the end of the world he is less particular, only saying that in those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; that the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers of heaven be shaken; that then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, who shall send his angels and gather his elect from the uttermost part of earth to the uttermost part of heaven. And concerning the time of this great event, very different is the account from that of the destruction of Jerusalem. Of the end of that nation it is expressly said, that generation should not pass away till all be fulfilled; but of the last day, our Lord adds, “ No man knoweth, no, not the angels of heaven, but the Father only.”

Thus, then, our blessed Teacher utters two prophecies,— one with many particulars, the other with few, both awful and impressive. If one of

these be true, no question but the other is also, having the same divine authority; and if the destruction of Jerusalem was in every particular foretold, who shall question—who shall dare to dispute the certainty of that great day which relates to the end of the world and its final judgment ?

Let us then inquire, first, what was the state of Jerusalem at the time of our Saviour's prophecy concerning it ? secondly, in what manner it was fulfilled ? and, thirdly, what we may conclude from it concerning the end of the world and the day of judgment ?

Now the state of the Jewish nation, in the time of our Saviour, was as secure, as apparently fixed and firmly ordered and established as any country or government in the earth; true, they were under the Roman power, but so were almost all other nations, and this was so far from being an apparent cause of their destruction, that it seemed an argument for their continuance, because no rebellions could arise within and among themselves, nor any enemies among the neighbouring nations. Their conquerors were ready to protect them, and indeed we find that their nation never enjoyed more security than at that period; their people were extremely numerous, and Jerusalem abounded with riches; wicked indeed they were, blind and forgetful of their God ; but only such as

believe in his providence will look upon this as an argument and cause of their destruction. In all outward appearance they stood safe, and happy, in peace, opulence, and false but full security, blindly confident and content. But that divine Person who saw into the future pronounced their coming destiny. He said plainly, that within a few years, before the end of one generation, these things should come to pass. I repeat them, that we should remember the accuracy with which they were completed.

The ruin of the temple and city is clearly foretold,—the extraordinary afflictions of the time. He declares that the gospel must first be preached to all nations ; that his disciples should be persecuted ; that false Christs should arise and deceivers, and that wherever the Roman eagles or standard, that is, the abomination of desolation of the prophet Daniel, should be placed, there should be the ruin and slaughter of the Jewish race.

Our duty is, therefore, to inquire if all these things thus prophesied did come to pass, and *when*. All this is happily left on record by a learned historian of their own nation, Josephus by name, a priest, but not a Christian : he was, therefore, not partial, much less would he, or indeed *could* he have written falsities which every one living could have disproved. And when I say Josephus

was not a Christian, I do not know for certainty. He writes little or nothing concerning it, but yet he must have *known* much. There were believers in all nations in his time. Why is he then silent ? If he did not believe in the evidence and pure spirit of this holy religion, why not proclaim his disbelief ? He had no fear on *that side*. The emperor and all his court were Pagans, and Josephus might have abused the doctrine of Christ and his apostles with perfect safety, and even with praise, and perhaps reward; but he is silent. Now if he were a believer entirely or in part, his silence is easily accounted for. He was afraid of rebuke, ridicule, loss, and punishment; for he was in favour at a heathen court. I have therefore, since I was capable of thinking, thought the silence of this learned Jew a good argument in favour of Christianity, and have cared very little whether the only passage in his history of the Jews which relates to our Saviour be spurious or authentic. He probably did not write it. Now this Hebrew historian expressly informs us, that about forty years after our Saviour's death, and before that generation were passed away, the temple was burned, viz., in the tenth day of the month of August, the same day and the same month in which it had once been destroyed by the king of Babylon, the city was taken after five

months' siege, in which the sufferings of the Jewish people were beyond description, almost beyond imagination.

Before this event, the gospel was preached by St. Paul and other disciples to all nations in the *then* known world; these disciples had also suffered the predicted punishment, and had taken the warning given by their Master, that is, wherever they found the Roman armies approach, they fled that place which was sure of destruction. The description of the sufferings of the Jews has in it something very horrible for a mind that forgets their exceeding obstinacy and depravity: the numbers crucified by their conquerors; the numbers slain by each other; burned in the temple, famished for want of food, perished by lingering and accumulated tortures, are an awful and striking proof that this was a peculiar judgment on a peculiar people, exemplary chastisement for hitherto unheard-of rebellion, complete vengeance for complicated sins.

"The delicate woman," as Moses writes, "the tender and delicate woman who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicacy and tenderness, her eye shall be evil towards the husband of her bosom, and towards her son, and towards her daughter, and towards her young ones whom she bare, for she shall eat them for want of all things, secretly in the siege

and straitness." This horrible circumstance actually came to pass, with other calamities of like nature in the siege of Jerusalem, both first and last, and many more grievous kinds of distress are related in the account of Josephus their historian.

Thus, then, we find our blessed Lord was pleased to foreshow to his disciples, two events, *both* to them, and *one* to us, of vast importance; that which was first to come to pass he described with many particulars, all very unlikely to happen in the common course of events. First, it was not likely that so small a state as Jerusalem should rebel against the vast power of the Roman empire, much less that all the Jews in other places of Judea should follow the example as they did; so that wheresoever the body, that is, the people of Israel, were, there were the Roman eagles gathered together. It was, further, very unlikely that when conquered elsewhere, the Jews should yet all shut themselves up in their city, and refuse the peace that was offered kindly, and repeatedly by the conqueror; that their extreme miseries should not drive them to submit, is still another unusual circumstance.

And it is even wonderful that all their own reverence, and all the care of the Roman conqueror Titus, could not save the temple, which was literally so destroyed that one stone was not left upon another; and, lastly, it is to be re-

marked, that instead of again building their temple and the city as they had once before, they fulfilled the prophecy of Moses and of our Redeemer, and we see them trodden under foot of the Gentiles in every place, as doubtless they will be, until the time of these Gentile nations be fulfilled.

And now let us seriously consider what should be our thoughts when we contemplate these important prophecies, when we find *that* concerning the fall of the Jews so very complete, so exactly fulfilled. Must we not be sure, be entirely and fully satisfied of the truth of the other prophecy, and look with faith and assurance for the end of the world, when the Son of man shall come with his angels in great power and glory, that day and hour of which no man knoweth ?

It seems as if our Redeemer meant that we should have this great proof of his future coming to banish all our doubts, to fill our minds with reverence, hope, and patience, when he was pleased to describe a peculiar event to take place in the world, at a particular time, and with particular circumstances, so that *when* that event came to pass, just in the way and at the time foretold, no one should reasonably have a doubt of the other event foretold with it, as certainly to be fulfilled in a future time known to God alone, but by us to be reverently expected.

Let us be assured that however delayed his

coming, yet our Lord will come; a thousand years are as one day to him who endureth for ever, and *all* will stand before his judgment-seat. Of the many reflections and resolutions to be deduced from this awful subject I will only urge the principal—the great folly and guilt of obtaining any profit or pleasure in such a world as this, at the price of faith and holiness, since the world and the good of it has such an end, and such an event must close all its enjoyments, and all its concerns. And secondly, the hardness and dulness of those hearts which the certainty of this event and the uncertainty of the time cannot soften into fear nor awake to repentance.

Whether this final close of mortal things will be in our days, our Maker only knoweth, but we have seen that it *will* be; and our days must be the preparation for it. The bodies of the dead shall hear his voice and live; therefore let us ever bear in mind the warning before we die—let us remember, this life is the only time given of preparation for another—that in order to avoid the terrible punishments of the wicked, we must seek the only remedy pointed out in the Scriptures, Christ Jesus the Saviour of sinners; let all awake to piety *now*, and they will be saved from destruction at *that* day; then shall they descend to the grave with assurance of that call which will quicken the body to join the soul, freed from the terrors of

judgment, rejoicing in the joys of heaven, saved from the horrors and reserved to the glories of the final scene. Men may cherish their own opinions of the mercy of our Judge, and the degree of their guilt, but as we have the written word, it is building on sand to trust anything besides. Hopes and opinions, not expressly spoken by scripture, may be true, but may be wrong. The gospel is truth, and there it is said, "He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned;" the one shall stand on the right-hand, the other on the left, that some shall go into condemnation and others into life eternal. These things being discovered to us, our safety lies in constant watchfulness and in sincere prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit, which alone can enable us to live in sobriety, righteousness, and holiness in this present world. Thus living we shall learn to die, and look forward to that closing scene, the bed of death; and beyond it, to a resurrection from the grave to a state of eternal happiness and glory, with the spirits of the blessed.

SERMON XI.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, AND ITS EFFECTS.

LUKE ii. 10.

“ And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.”

IN dwelling upon the glorious communication of the mercy of God, which at this season we commemorate, I would call your thoughts to the great reformation wrought in the world by the Redeemer’s coming, which was announced in the words which I have just read. Whithersoever the religion of Christ was carried, there was carried virtue and restoration to virtue in its principles and operation.

We are led by our subject to look backward upon the rise and progress, the birth and perpetual increase, the infant state and wonderful growth of the church of Christ, from the nativity of the

Saviour to the time in which we live. Our Lord, we are informed by St. Luke, sent forth seventy disciples to prepare the way before him as well as the twelve apostles, but we are not to consider these as all who believed in him. Many others heard his divine words, and saw the miracles which he did, but how many soever of these there might be, we are informed by the same evangelist that after the resurrection, when the apostles and brethren were assembled together, the number of disciples was about one hundred and twenty; but I repeat, we are not to imagine the number of believers was thus bounded; many hundreds were the witnesses of his miracles, the admirers of his wisdom, but they were afraid, they hesitated; they were not willing to encounter the displeasure of their priests and rulers; they kept from the christian assemblies in which was so much danger, and they waited to see what would become of a doctrine so wonderfully introduced, and so powerfully opposed; but by-and-by this infant church, on the preaching of Peter and the other apostles, was increased by three thousand converts, and many priests became obedient to the faith. Peter was sent to the devout centurion, and a man, not a Jew, became a member of the infant church. Philip baptized an officer of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, and some faint rays appeared of that light which was soon to lighten all nations. This

was the first stage in the history and progress of the christian church when it was, with slight exceptions, confined to Jews; but now a great event was nigh at hand. Paul, (Saul is his Hebrew name,) a young man of much learning, great natural abilities, and extraordinary zeal, had been a very warm persecutor of the new religion; he kept the garments of those who cast them off that they might have no impediment to their cruelty in stoning the martyr Stephen. He, therefore, encouraged and applauded their act—he did more—he persecuted the church in Jerusalem, and to augment his power, begged for letters of the chief priests to Damascus, that would give him authority to persecute the Christians in that city; but Paul, though mistaken, was sincere; he believed that he was doing right, and acting in the cause of truth and of the God of truth; so he found mercy—he was made a chosen vessel—an apostle, more enduring, more persevering, more warm, more energetic, and more successful than any other of the teachers of the doctrines of his divine Master. We do not read of *his* converting one family as that of Cornelius, or one person as the eunuch, but he converted the people of many *nations*; he founded churches in Europe and in Asia, at Corinth, at Ephesus, and at Galatia, in Thessalonica, in Laodicea, and in many cities not perhaps favoured by his epistles, but instructed by his dis-

courses—Athens, for instance, that seat of earthly wisdom and idolatry. There were added to the church by the preaching of Peter three thousand souls at Jerusalem; by the preaching of Paul great multitudes were converted in all the known world; daily and hourly were added to the happy and chosen people such as should be saved.

The scripture, and the writings of the early Fathers, (as they are called) describe the singleness of heart and purpose, the divine joy and gladness, the holy delight and rejoicing of these infant churches, these first Christians; how they lived among unbelievers, how they met in solitude and darkness, how they sang hymns of rejoicing and praise, how they adored the power which had called them from darkness into this marvellous light, and how they loved and obeyed the good apostle as an angel of the Holy One, willing, if it had been possible, to have plucked out their eyes and have given them unto him. I would that I had power to represent to you their gratitude for the coming of their Saviour upon earth; what they felt when they contemplated the nativity of the Redeemer of men—their unspeakable joy—how they communicated it one to another. All earthly considerations were then left; for a season we find there were no poor and rich among them, no high and low, no servant or master, in that brotherhood; then all things were in common, not of ne-

cessity but in joy; not to be continued as a custom, binding any, but as a peculiar pleasure, happiness, and comfort, enjoyed by them at that time.

This was the state of the early church at the very dawn of Christianity! The rest of the *world* yet unbelieving and unconverted, and *they* ransomed and redeemed—the early favoured participants of the glad tidings, that were to be not only glory to the people of Israel, but the enlightening call of the world at large. So far the New Testament is our chief guide, for the rest we depend upon human authority. Yet we are not left in darkness; from the very times of the apostles are christian and heathen witnesses, who have left us account of what was then doing. We have at this day remaining (as proofs how the gospels and epistles were received) several authentic writings bearing witness of the same truths, and quoting and treating of the books of the New Testament which we now have—sometimes in the very words of the evangelists, sometimes in their sense and meaning. From this time even to three hundred years was this church striving against the powers of the world, its vices, and prejudices—against the inveterate malice of the Jews, the offended authority of the Romans and the indifference and unconcern of the wealthy and luxurious of all nations where the glad tidings were carried. The Christians in these times had not churches, not

temples made with hands. What was meant by churches was congregations and assemblies of believers who met as they could by night, chiefly in secret places—by river sides—in retirements—in private rooms and retreats inaccessible by, or unknown to, *persons* in authority. Now all this, as we must judge by the nature of our own hearts, must have been the effect of thorough conversion producing this concord, confidence, and love, patience under persecution, and mutual support, which nothing but the christian spirit could then have produced; they were subject to perpetual executions, imprisonments, and deaths; these gave rise to unexampled instances of fidelity and trust. The Christians of that time were as one family, and each member bound by love to every other; people thus pressed without by power, and thus united within by affection, had a kind and measure of happiness which we should strive to attain, and which could only have been derived from the most stedfast belief that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead, and that they also should rise and be with him. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our *faith*.”

Such were the circumstances which added to the mutual love of the Christians in those early times, and to that trust which they had in their risen Lord. Among the persecutions there were often especial devastations which befel the early

church; one under the emperor Nero, who being suspected himself of setting fire to the city of Rome, caused the crime to be laid to the charge of the professors of the new religion, and they were tortured and put to death with the greatest inhumanity. There are nine other of these recorded persecutions; *some* at the instigation of the unbelieving Jews, others for the refusal of the Christians to submit to certain pagan rites and modes of worship. There were besides persons who accused the churches, not only of rebellion and disobedience, but of atheism and contempt of their gods, and then (as they were obliged to meet in secret places and privately) there were laid to their charge crimes of every description that secrecy and darkness can give birth to. These persecutions made many martyrs, who all died rejoicing, and some with exceeding great joy. There was no doubt among them—scarcely was there fear; many even desired the glory of martyrdom, and all might have avoided it. It was said, “Cast a little salt upon the fire, and no one will hurt you;” but they asked, “What is casting a little salt upon the fire?” It is to be understood, was the reply, as joining in the sacrifice of our gods. Then said the Christians, “send us from your altars, and cast us to your flames.”

Now as these Christians were always in danger, and always had the full assurance of faith that

they should be sustained by their Redeemer in their trials, and received by him in their death; and as they naturally became endeared to each other by the same sufferings and expectations, and were led to rejoice in that only good and happy prospect which their divine Master had opened to them, it may perhaps be conceived with what joy and holy rapture they united to do honour to the different periods in the life of Christ, and how they celebrated with their whole mind and strength, their whole heart and spirit, the birthday of their Lord and Redeemer. There was another event which made a very strong impression upon the Christians of that day—I mean the total destruction of Jerusalem, and that radical overthrow of the temple that literally one stone was not left upon another. When they read and remembered the prophecy of their Saviour, and then saw before them that dreadful accomplishment of it, and before that generation had passed away, they became as it were doubly assured; they had been warned by their Master to fly, and they fled; they were safe, and like Abraham after the destruction of Sodom, could see the whole country, the fire of which went up, as from a furnace. Thus during the first three hundred years the religion of the Christians was going on increasing from many causes,—increasing from persecution, from the prophecies confirmed, from the writings of learned converts afterwards called

fathers, from the courage of the martyrs under torture, from their holy lives and conversation, and from the follies, wickedness, and profligacy of the pagan superstition. So Christianity flourished, and became of such a body and strength, that the lords of the heathen world found they had no place nor office, nor trust, nor trade, nor occupation, but if it were lawful and right, Christians were placed in them; every one could trust a Christian's promise. A heathen servant sought a christian master, for he was sure of humane treatment; a heathen master sought a christian servant, for he was sure of honest service. What men thus loved in others, they by degrees sought to become themselves; and when Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, and lord of the civilized world, embraced Christianity, he found all things prepared for the change, for all who thought or cared about religion were of his opinion; and I need not describe how the birth of Christ was then celebrated.

When the conqueror of many rivals, and the first christian emperor, openly proclaimed his own conversion, and invited his subjects of all nations to partake of the mercy—from this time, that is, about the year 330, the whole civilized world became Christians; the only religion that ever prevailed without force against power, and that (originating among an obscure people in a remote province) travelled on from year to year, from

place to place, from one kingdom to another people, till it had overcome prejudice and the established superstition, and had put down all power and authority, and, like as its divine Master shall do, saw all its enemies under its feet. It is the nativity of this religion, once so persecuted, now so triumphant, the birth of the church of Christ, and of Christ as man, that we are called upon solemnly but joyfully to celebrate. Let us chiefly remember that the sole cause we can have for our joy, like the early Christians, is our faith; we can scarcely be glad on earth, unless we have expectations in heaven. But all true Christians have these blessed expectations, and they know that unto them a Son was born, unto them a Saviour was given; that he has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that is against them; that he is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth; that he was made to be sin for us, who himself knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

These are the true causes of the Christian's joy ; and if you can feel them, and rest your hopes on the happiness they hold out to you, I know not anything I can add, nor anything I need add; you well remember the words in the message of the angel, the glad tidings which are to all people; you well remember that through him we have access by one spirit to the Father, and are no

more strangers, but fellow-citizens of the household of God, and will recollect the words of the venerable man of God, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

But again, I ask why did these early Christians rejoice so sincerely? Because they sincerely and earnestly believed; and according to our faith will be our joy. We can surely distinguish such joy from the mere external and assumed kind of rejoicing, that is but little more than merriment and festivity, an agreement to remember a season which has in every age of Christianity been celebrated by some outward appearances of gladness and mutual congratulation. We can most readily see how far this falls beneath the true and real gladness of heart, the rejoicing of those whose faith is fixed upon the Lord the Saviour, and whose hope of heaven is lively and strong; they alone will possess this true and spiritual joy, who indeed feel their interest in the birth of him who brought light into a world of darkness, and pardon to a race of sinners. Let us not then rest in that poor and fruitless celebration of an event so glorious, and producing so much happiness; let us not be as spectators, but rejoice as sincere believers and partakers of the mercy of that all-interesting message of the angel, “Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”

SERMON XII.

IMITATION OF CHRIST.

PHIL. ii. 5.

“ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

WHEN we direct our minds to a view of the character of our blessed Lord and Redeemer, we may think of him as in his union with the God-head, and of his existence before all worlds; or we may likewise contemplate him in his union with the manhood, when he took upon him our nature, and for us became liable to all (sin excepted) which we endure.

And in this union with our nature we look upon our blessed Lord, first, as the sacrifice for sin; the Mediator between God and man ; the Intercessor for our transgressions ; the Propitiation for our offences. This is that fruit of the character of the Son of God which calls for our most grateful

remembrance, the most heartfelt acknowledgments for such mercy and goodness.

Next to this is the contemplation of our Lord as a teacher sent from God, who has given to man such holy precepts, such pure and divine laws and commandments, as tend to the purification of our nature, and lead us to a great portion of the comforts of this world of trial, as well as to the happiness of a world to come; inconceivable indeed to us, but to which every true believer directs his hope, and looks forward in faith towards God, and in charity with man.

And again, we consider our Lord as man, and as a pattern for mankind, when for us he became as we are, liable to the wants and sufferings of man's nature—as he afforded an example for us to follow, while he condescended to become, as it were, a stranger from the happiness and glory of a state of which we can at present know but this, that it is most glorious and most happy.

It is of our divine Master in this his state of humility, a man tempted and suffering, that I purpose at this time to speak, and to consider how and in what respects he is an example whom we ought to follow, leaving to another occasion the mediation of the Son of God, and that great act of mercy, the sacrifice for sin; and omitting also the consideration of our Lord as the great instructor and guide of man, who spake as never man before

had spoken, and who so clearly pointed out to us the broad and the narrow way—that which it concerns us so deeply to avoid—as the way that leadeth to destruction, and that which we should walk in as it tendeth towards the life eternal.

Our subject, then, is the imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ in those things wherein a being so unlike every other can be imitated or followed by creatures so weak, so liable to sin and error as we all are, and yet, through the mercies granted to us, so capable of recovery from both;—a being degraded, but not utterly lost; going astray, but not forsaken; in error, but not without a guide; having a foe in his own frailty, but a friend in his Lord and Redeemer.

Our Lord giveth example to man in the virtues of humility and meekness, with patience, temperance, and charity; but it is not these virtues, considered in themselves only, which we contemplate, but the practice of them under the most trying circumstances, the hardest temptations. For our Lord was humble, with a consciousness of his vast superiority; he was meek under the greatest provocations, and with the full power of retaliating the injuries he received; he was temperate, with the command of all things; and he went about doing good, when evil was done unto him. In these cases, and under these circumstances, how exemplary was the humility, the patience, the

moderation, and the charity, in which our Lord has given to us such pattern for our conduct !

When I speak of our Saviour as forgiving injuries, and having mercy on those who inflicted them, it may remind us of an admonition of St. Paul, which we have all heard, and many of us, I trust, reflected upon: " If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

" Coals of fire" may, at a first view, seem a vindictive expression, as if we were admonished to treat our enemy with love and kindness, in order to increase his punishment hereafter. But this is so contrary to the spirit of a Christian, that no one who really is such, can willingly admit of this meaning, and happily there is no occasion. The words are words of similitude. Coals of fire placed upon metals in a state nearly of fusion, are to promote that effect, and cause the melting which is intended. So are benefits done for injuries, they melt the hardness of man's heart, and make it ready for every good impression. Some said the effect of the coals of fire is a likeness to that painful shame which a man must feel who receives good in return for his evil; but this is only another way of expressing the same sentiment. This shame must be felt on such occasions, and will naturally go before the true penitence and softness of spirit. All I mean to advert

to is, the mistake of supposing that any Christian precept or doctrine can recommend the doing an act of charity and benevolence for a cruel purpose; to feed the hungry, and give drink to him who thirsts, only that he may receive the greater condemnation. This would be far from the spirit of him who would imitate his divine Master, who would have that mind within him which was in Christ Jesus.

But to return. Humility is a christian virtue, and is seldom found in those who are not Christians indeed. It is not because people are poor that they are humble; on the contrary, a strong and resisting spirit is oftentimes seen in the very lowest stations of society. Man is naturally proud and vindictive, and we need not go into the superior classes of our fellow-creatures to behold the effects of these evil passions. Humility and meekness are nearly related, but they are not the same. Humility is of the mind, meekness in the temper. A person may be humble in spirit without meekness, and meek without humility. Humility is opposed to pride, and meekness to anger. Both are amiable, and become the Christian. To try our humility, we must be subjected to pride and arrogance; to prove our meekness, we must submit under provocation. We are made humble by reflecting upon our faults, but we become meek by bearing the faults and infirmities of other persons.

Both will richly pay us for our endeavours to acquire them, and as in the attainment of all other virtues and graces, so in these, prayer for the divine assistance is essentially requisite, and a serious view of that faultless example which we have in our Lord and Redeemer. Whosoever would follow him, must take up the cross; and in this, humility of spirit and meekness of temper are both implied. Humility is always a virtue, but is the greater under the more trying circumstances. Our Lord was humble, with consciousness of power and greatness, not only more than man can attain to, but beyond what he could conceive.

This we must bear in mind. A man may appear humble in the presence of those who are greater and in a station above him, but he is not truly so, unless the humility remains when he is with his equals, and with those who are inferior. The poorest of our brethren have some who are placed in some respects below them; they are husbands or fathers, or they have bodily strength or powers of mind which others have not. If, then, they are not humble with these, they have not the true humility; for the proud can stoop when it answers their purpose. So, too, meekness is to be judged of. It is the part of this virtue which is comprehended under the apostle's description of christian charity, that it is not

easily provoked, that it beareth all things, endureth all things. It giveth not railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing. Personal outrage or insult is very hard to be borne, but we know who bore them ! When smitten by one who had received no offence, what said the meek and patient sufferer ? “ If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me ?”

In this the apostle of our Lord was not equally patient with his divine Master. An high priest had commanded him to be smitten, and he said, “ God shall smite thee, thou whited wall, for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law ?” Doubtless the provocation was great, but the meekness of the Saviour was not to be overcome by the virulence and insult of man ; that of the apostle yielded in some degree to the temptation.

Of temperance and moderation likewise, in general it may be observed, that they become greater virtues under greater temptations. We call not him temperate who lives on little, if he hath no means of obtaining more ; nor is a person to be commended for his moderation, if his nature or his fortune have denied him the means of gratification.

Moderation and temperance are of the will and spirit, not of situation and necessity ; and we can-

not forget that not only a want of means, but a love of money, may keep men from extravagance and expensive pleasures, and then we cannot allow them the credit of self-government, for they do but sacrifice one inclination for another, preferring the power of purchasing indulgence to the enjoyment of the purchase.

But look to the example of our divine Master. He could command the supply for a multitude of fasting men, and could forbear himself to take more than needful food of the most common kind. He could have bidden the stones to become not only bread, but whatever he desired to behold or to enjoy ; but he knew not the frailty of appetite, and though he felt the necessity of taking food, he took it as of necessity. Having our nature, he must have had our nature's want and supply. "The Son of man came eating and drinking," it is written, that is, he mixed in common life, and was not like John the Baptist in the wilderness, nor fed on locusts and wild honey ; but our Lord was in that an example of moderation and thankfulness. The Saviour was with his mother at a marriage, and miraculously made the water wine ; but he made it not for himself. It was an instance of his benevolence, and not of self-indulgence.

Hence we learn what moderation and temperance are. They are not the virtues that circum-

stances occasion, but such as rule in the heart and direct the conduct. They who have all the means for indulgence, and regard not cost, these, if moderate, must love moderation ; and so may we reason of temperance and self-command, if it be ours, it exists alike in all places. It is not frugality, however commendable that may be ; for the temperate person is temperate at the table of the rich man who fares sumptuously every day, as at his own scanty board, which he supplies as prudence directs him. I do not say that the temperate man never feasts, but that he feasts temperately. To do anything moderately, is not always to do it in the same degree, for in both the feast and the fast there may be a regard to circumstances, to the occasion ; there may be forbearance in the one case, indulgence in the other, and yet in both moderation.

From the example of our Lord we may likewise learn patience, which becomes the true disciple of him who suffered before he was glorified, who endured the pangs of death on the cross before he arose from the grave in triumph ; who submitted himself to the insult as well as the injustice of man, and gave an example of that virtue which is difficult for man to practise, that of enduring reproach from the people whom he came to save ; who was forsaken by them whom he had chosen, and upbraided them not, and who, suffering under

a sentence as cruel as it was unjust, said, “ Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Patience, at least the patience mentioned in the sacred writings, is of two kinds, that which submits quietly to injuries and insult, to sufferings and deprivations, and that which waits in holy confidence for the divine favour and deliverance from evil. Our Lord affordeth instances of both kinds, first, by the unresisting endurance of pains and reproaches, and, secondly, by the full assurance of a resurrection from the dead. Patience endures the evil, and waits for the good.

The patience of Job appears to have been rather of this latter kind—waiting for the good—than of the former. His trials were most severe, and the upbraiding of his friends was most cruel ; but he did not rest under them with that meek and quiet spirit which we behold in our Redeemer. When his possessions, his children, and all he had were lost ; when his body was covered with boils, and he sat down in the ashes, no murmur indeed escaped his lips ; when his wife bade him trust no longer in his integrity, but submit and die, he replied with meekness and piety, “ Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil ?” But after this, when his friends came and sat with him seven days, and spake not yet a word, Then “ Job opened his mouth and cursed his day, saying, Let the day perish

wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived." " Why died I not from the womb ? why did I not give up the ghost ? For the thing that I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come ; I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet, yet trouble came."

Now this is not the language of him who submitteth quietly to evil ; this is not that patience which is meek, silent, and without a murmur. What, then, was the patience of Job ! His patience was a quiet waiting upon God in full trust, that at his own time he would make manifest his integrity, being confident that no secret sin (as his friends had asserted) had brought these evils upon him. " I know," said he, " that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." And though we take these words in their prophetical sense, yet they were used by Job as a strong assertion that God would make manifest the truth and integrity of his servant : he waited for this, and this waiting was his patience.

This appears to have been the full and pious expectation of this great and suffering man. But leaving this, I repeat that our Lord gave example

of patience in both kinds—meekness under suffering, and assurance of victory over the powers of darkness and death.

Such are a part of those virtues which we are enjoined to observe and to imitate in our divine Master—meekness, humility, temperance, and patient submission to the will of God, with compassion to the sufferings and afflictions of man, to sickness and sorrow, and all that is distressing to him in his progress through life. Let us think whom we imitate, and what our reward. And that we may do this, let us endeavour to make our will that of our great example. Let us pray that we may put off all that is hard, selfish, partial, and unjust, and that we may acquire or retain a new heart and new affections, serving the Lord in meekness and lowliness of spirit, in temperance, patience, and hope, in faith and charity ; and, in the words of the apostle, Let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus our Lord and Redeemer.

SERMON XIII.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

1 Cor. i. 23.

“ But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.”

THE word which is here translated stumbling-block, means, in some places, a snare; in others, an impediment or hindrance. The cross was this to the Jews, because it prevented their belief in the Redeemer. When he came to them, he came not as the Messiah they desired or expected. The cross was an offence and redemption by it, a kind of redemption they would not listen to. The miracles which some of them witnessed all might believe; the doctrines which many of them heard all might consider, and the wise among them must approve; but the humiliation arising from the cross, that is from faith in a crucified Sa-

viour, was to them a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

And then, too, this doctrine brought with it the admission of the Gentiles into a participation of the mercy which was offered to them; made the people of all nations who were believers as one fold under one Shepherd. This their pride and the prejudices of their rulers could not submit to; selfish and covetous, bigoted and cruel, ostentatious and hypocritical, they could see no beauty in a holiness that was not ceremonious and legal, and no excellence in the precepts that were directed to the heart. The glad tidings of the gospel lost their effect upon such people, and though many of the first believers were Jews, yet they in general rejected the word of truth, made light of their last invitation, and awaited that judgment from the God of their forefathers, which so soon fell upon the children of disobedience. Thus to the Jews was the cross of Christ an occasion of offence, for they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people. To the Greeks it was foolishness, that is, it had not their favourite kind of wisdom, their learning and power of words to recommend it. It encouraged no vain speculations; it called them off from such fruitless pursuits to serve the living God in holiness and truth, in sincerity and earnestness, all the days of their life. It placed wisdom in faith, meekness, purity, and

obedience. It was an enemy to their self-love and self-sufficiency, to their popular and delusive prejudices, to their subtle and endless disputations. This your unknown God, said St. Paul, I declare to you; but they continued to dispute about his existence, his essence, his attributes, and were unwilling to attend to the messengers who taught them his will, and showed them the conditions of his mercy. And yet these divine truths made their way, powerfully and rapidly, among these learned people. The "foolishness," as they supposed it, became more and more effectual to the casting off those vain conceits and empty speculations. Weighty and solemn truths prevailed, and at the time when the Jewish nation and temple were finally dispersed and destroyed, the Gentiles had embraced the glad tidings which the Jews rejected, and were become, in turn, the people of their God, and believers in him who was crucified for the sins of the world. Still, I repeat, we must bear in mind, that though this was the general effect of Christianity among the Jews and the Greeks, a great number of the Jews did, nevertheless, believe, and for a time a considerable portion of the Gentiles rejected the faith, that is, there were yet among the Jews those to whom the preaching of the cross was not a stumbling-block, and among the Greeks those to whom it was foolishness.

And now, let us consider, what is the preaching of the cross to us ? Is it not, I would ask, even to some of us still that rock of offence and stone of stumbling ? not just for the same cause as it was to the Jews and Greeks, but for some cause ? Are we sure that religion, the christian religion, has not something in it at which the natural heart revolts ? Let us inquire. The objection of the Jews was, that the gospel militated against their favourite and long-indulged opinions and prejudices; and of the Greeks, that it was too plain, void of ornament. Our objection is, that it requires a renouncing of self in every material respect, and this will appear in the three particulars of our judgment, our passions, and what we call our merits. It requires the renunciation of our judgment thus far, that when we are convinced that the gospel is truth, we must take it fully as it is, and not permit that judgment of ours to alter or vary any part of it at our pleasure. Our reason is given us that we may seek the truth and find it; but having found it, reason has done its office, and must submit to that truth which it has found. In travelling through an unknown country, our reason tells us to seek a guide, and our judgment helps us to choose one who is able to conduct us; but having chosen, both reason and judgment must submit to his direction.

So in our religion. Judge of its truth and try

it; but when it becomes evident that it is true, we must not judge of this or that particular, because they do not suit our inclination or coincide with our opinion. The awful truths of revelation respecting the divine nature of our Redeemer, the voluntary sacrifice for sin, the mysterious incarnation of the divinity, and the unity of the person of Jesus Christ, are all subjects inexplicable and incomprehensible, and it is in vain that the pride and subtlety of human wisdom goes about to explain and unfold them, as if they were only the obscurities of human error, and not the mysteries of holy writ.

Nor are these the only kind of truths to which the understanding of man must submit. We believe that God knoweth all things, and ordereth all by his word; yet there is one of his creatures, man, a being conscious of sin, sensible of wilful error, that is of going his own way and obeying his own will, and who shall reconcile these things? No one; and in this also the understanding must submit. Many passages in the sacred writings require a like submission of our reasoning pride, and with regard to some, I cannot but conceive the very attempt to elucidate and explain them has its rise in this great and leading infirmity of man, his unwillingness to submit and acknowledge his weakness.

But not his understanding alone; he must deny

himself in other respects, and especially that ever-craving part of himself, his passions and inclinations, in short, his will. But this, you will perhaps tell me, that all religion all morality requires. By no means in the same degree. What religion ever so claimed the service of these first springs and movements of the heart which constitute so much of our nature ?

In Christianity the axe is laid at the root of the corrupt tree, and it is not enough to cut off here and there the too luxuriant branches. The command goes to the heart. What religion but that of Jesus Christ ever inculcated those self-denying precepts,—“ Love your enemies,” “ Do good to them that hate you.” Our Lord requireth the subdued will, the obedience that affection pays, the duty that is prompted by love, and the worship that is of the Spirit ; and it is this that makes the difficulty. That we may not commit the crime of murder, we are required to abstain from the sins of hatred, malice, and revenge ; that we may not steal, we are commanded not even to covet what is another’s ; but what numbers have ill-will and covetousness at heart who yet offend not against the letter of the sixth or eighth commandment ? It is not, then, the outward conformity merely, but it is the inward disposition that is required, and herein sacrifice of self must be made. We are not born Chris-

tians any more than we are born soldiers. There must be training and discipline, courage and constancy, strict obedience where it is due, and resistance of every wish that opposes it ; and this requires the second sacrifice that we have mentioned,—the *will* must be offered at the altar of obedience, and then, when the judgment is thus subdued and the will is thus conquered, it will remain (in the third place) that we deny ourselves all merit ; for we are still unprofitable servants.

Many are deceived in their obedience to this duty. It is frequently said by persons of very different degrees of moral virtue, that they put their sole and full trust in the mercy of their God, and look for pardon through faith in the Redeemer only ; but how often may we hear these very persons comforting themselves, even on their death-bed, with the pleasing picture of their own worth ! They affirm that they are in love and charity, they bear no malice nor hatred in their hearts, they wrong not their neighbours, they forgive sincerely, they are in charity with all mankind. This disposition of mind is most natural to man, and even in his very humility his pride is manifest—in his very confession he adds to his offences ! So hard is it to resign ourselves and renounce even our resemblances of virtue. And yet this self-renunciation is the great criterion of

christian discipline,—“ Whosoever will come after me,” saith our Lord, “ let him deny himself.”

But here I may be asked, how comes it to pass that many sincere Christians, St. Paul himself included, have had this comfort at the close of life, that they had lived as became Christians, that henceforth there was laid up for them a crown of glory to be given them at the appearing of their Lord, because they had fought the great fight and been obedient ? The answer is, that this joy and exultation of St. Paul and other sincere Christians was occasioned, not by reflections on their own merits, but by a view of what they had been enabled to do, since they became members of the christian covenant. These holy men, by their reflections at their latter end, did not signify their confidence in their own acts and power, but they rejoiced in the fruit of good living, which the grace of God had enabled them to bring forth. They would not have said, Let us stand or fall in the judgment-day according to our works, but they would have rejoiced in such works as they were sure would not have been brought forth had they not been partakers of the grace of God as revealed in the christian dispensation. It is one thing, at the close of life, to talk of the good done, the charity felt, and the forgiveness sealed, and the trials suffered as the consequence of their own efforts, and it is another thing to reflect upon

them—upon trials sustained and duties performed, all as the effect of a religion sent from God, and done in meekness and humility of spirit.

Besides, the Christian not only knows and feels his good deeds and benevolent feelings, his patient endeavour of trial and resistance of sin, to be works of grace, but he is sure that even in his best works is much of man's imperfection, and that there are many of his works which are in their own nature evil, and much in the heart that militates against its best and purest desires and inclinations.

This, then, is true, that an obedient, a just and religious life will give pleasure on reflection, because it is the fruit of the faith which we as Christians possess, but reflections on our obedience and moral good conduct, taken independently of our religion, if they give us pleasure, it must be the effect of vanity and self-deception.

We find, then, that the cross is a stumbling-block, an offence, even among professing Christians. How many refuse to bend the pride of their judgment, the stubbornness of their will, or the support of their own merit, to the simplicity of the words of truth, the sanctity of the divine precepts, and the righteousness that is of faith alone ! Not, as I said before, that we are to discard our judgment, our will, or our virtues, and

make them nothing, for then we should cease to be creatures in a state of trial.

No, we are to retain our judgment and capacity to improve and cultivate our talents, and yet in its highest state of improvement the judgment must bow down implicitly and meekly to the truth that is revealed, however mysterious and however incomprehensible.

Neither are we to be without will or desire, nor can we, for then trial would cease ; but the stronger the desire is, the more urgently are we called upon to make it a sacrifice. We are bought with a price, and are no more our own, the sheep of the good Shepherd whom we are implicitly to follow.

And if we have brought ourselves under this yoke, and have been faithful and obedient in many things, still we must recollect that “in many things we offend all,” that even when our deeds are virtuous, our hearts are often corrupt, and that our best actions have their alloy of error, frailty, or vice.

It is self-renouncing which the gospel requires, that rejection of our own wisdom, our own will, and our own virtue. Let us rely on the wisdom which is from above, on the will of God, which obeyed leads to happiness, on the goodness that has brought salvation for us. Let us avoid the

error of both kinds, and the enthusiasm that would blind us to the moral sanctity of the gospel.

This self-rejection is not easy, but it is required of us, and if we be humble and meek, we have a foundation for it. The purchase is not easy, but the possession is inestimable; for whoever are really and freely denying themselves for Christ's sake, have taken up the cross of the Redeemer, and are following him in the way to glory and happiness eternal.

SERMON XIV.

THE CROSS AND CROWN.

LUKE xiv. 27.

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”

WHEN our Lord said of the kingdom of heaven, “ Few there be that find it,” whether he spoke of few by comparison with all who were born into the world, or few in the common acceptation of the words, I do not purpose now to consider, but take the words as a warning, that whosoever would enter into the kingdom of heaven must have difficulties to undergo, works to perform, griefs to endure, and temptations to overcome ;—and this exactly accords with the words of the text. There is a cross to be borne. It is scarcely needful to observe that we speak of Christians in general—men or women of understanding, or of

age to understand—infants die, and our faith assures us that God has taken them to his mercy—without proof of their perseverance and duty—persons void of intellect and due understanding, as they are not improveable, so neither can they be accountable. God can illuminate all darkness, and every disease of mind and body are removed at his pleasure.

Leaving these, therefore, we return to our subject, namely, the necessity there is that all who would enter into the straight gate must strive to do it ; all who would serve and please God must be masters of, and deny themselves ; all who would triumph with the Lord who is in glory must patiently endure with the Lamb who was slain ; *all* who would be Christians indeed must endure their cross whatever it be. That we do not suffer, or are tried as the first Christians, is certain, but still we have our trials, nay, that very ease and freedom we have in our religion, is itself a temptation to sloth and inattention. Because we are not punished for being Christians, many scarcely inquire whether they are so or not. We shall not be brought into trouble for our faith, nor questioned by rulers and judges over us, and so, many forget to judge and question their own hearts, what is the state of their faith and how it preserves them from disobedience, and what trials they could endure for Christ's sake. There is a

proverbial saying amongst religious persons, “*no cross no crown.*” If we be not abased, we cannot be exalted ; if we do not suffer we cannot triumph ; if we do not fight, we must not hope to overcome ; and this is certainly the case with respect to the pursuits, profits, and honours of this life. There must be the labour or there will not be the reward. How much more true of the highest and noblest of all pursuits. The wise son of Sirach informs us that “wisdom will at first take a man through crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline, until she may trust his soul, and try him by her laws, then will she return the strait way unto him, and comfort him, and show him her secrets.”

And so it is with all spiritual good. It is to be attained by pains, by labour, by suffering, by faith ; there must be the cross where we look for the crown. These questions might be put to all men. What is *your* crown ? and what is likely to be *your* cross ? or, in other words, what is it you principally desire ? and what lies in your way and prevents your attaining it ? But leaving all other objects of men’s pursuits, let us consider the soul’s happiness in a future life as OUR CROWN, the first object of our wishes, hopes and prayers, and then ask ourselves, what are the crosses we have to bear, and the hindrances we find in our

way ? Yet thus far we may observe of this life's good, real or fancied, (which so many seek after,) that none, however fond and desirous of honour, or power, or wealth, or pleasure, are so lost in the pursuit of these, but even they will confess that the joys and glories of a life to come are far beyond comparison the greater and nobler objects. And yet it might be very hard to prove that the most religious suffer more or make greater sacrifices to their eternal welfare and happiness than those persons do, to the things which end with this world, things which, whatever pains they cost, can only reward their admirers for a little time, and even in that little they discover how poor and ungratifying a nature they are really of. If then, as we all must wish and pursue some object, and that chiefly and more anxiously than others, *surely* it should be that which *all* confess is most worthy, and yet none can prove that it is attended with more trouble, care, sorrow, (or, in these times,) difficulty, or danger, than transitory advantages. Then, too, in a pursuit of eternal happiness, there can be no disappointment. Other things that you may wish for, you may lose, and be disappointed by your failure, or you may gain, and yet not be happy, and so be disappointed in your success ; or you may arrive at them when it is too late to enjoy or profit by them, but a strife and labour for the joys and glories of heaven *can* bring no

disappointment. They who indulge pride and delight themselves in vanities, and live upon the reputation in which the world holds them, what trouble do they not give themselves, what sacrifices do they not make ? and yet they are often exceedingly mortified and disappointed, and never thoroughly satisfied with the end when attained. They who are covetous and fond of increase and abundance are not perhaps so much disappointed, but they are often criminal, often vexed by the slow progress of their beloved wealth, often tempted by injustice, and always degraded, and sometimes tormented, by the base and contemptible nature of their favourite object. The lovers of sensuality, the indulger of every lawless inclination, or at least every restless, one has so much misery, that no believer in his pilgrimage, no penitent in his self-reproaches, endures so much for the good of his soul as these persons for the indulgence of their senses, so that this great and good part not only promises the most glorious reward, but it actually requires the more easy sacrifices.

In the pursuit, too, of the crown of life there must be success as long as we sincerely follow it—for the very circumstance, the very fact that we are following it, is a proof, that we are succeeding ; this can be said of no earthly good ; and the older we grow, and the more incapable of enjoying

the things of this world, the nearer we are to the end of that trouble and expectation which opens the treasures of an eternal inheritance. Heaven, then, and the joys of heaven, being the crown and object which every true Christian will chiefly pursue, let our thoughts be now directed to the cross that hinders us in our way, and which we must avoid, endure, or overcome. This cross is various, according to our several cases; we are hindered in many ways. The cross of the first Christians was pain and torture, fire, and the fury of the wild beasts, insult and cruelty, contempt and death; and this their faith overcame, and they set the crown so continually and so fully in their sight, that in the midst of trial and torture, their minds were fixed upon that, and that only. Afterwards, a new trial awaited them, when they lived at peace and in triumph, when kings and queens became nursing fathers and nursing mothers to the Church, and gloried in these titles as marks of the first distinction. Then revenge for former persecutions, pride in recent success, luxury from unaccustomed wealth, and ambition from a prospect of power, all became temptations to the children of the late humble and suffering Christians, and many fell into the snares of the enemy of souls, who thus spread for them all the seductions that sinful pleasure, worldly emolument, and earthly power can hold out to catch the soul of erring, frail mankind.

But with some few exceptions, and in some peculiar stations, these evils of both kinds, misery and excess, the persecution that alarms the soul, and the honours and luxuries which weaken and overcome it, have long ceased, and other crosses, other difficulties, are now presented to us, that we may be sure there is a work to do, and warfare to wage, before we also can take our rest, and have a reasonable hope of being crowned for victory. Want of faith, want of resolution, want of a decided, steady, fixed principle of religion,—these are with the greater part of us the causes of our failing in the first great object of human existence. Now who can have a difficulty so unconquerable in his way as want of faith ? When the very blessing and crown he aspires to, are scarcely believed to be attainable, when the prayers he offers are accompanied by doubts if they will be heard or can be accepted ? When the condemnation of the wicked and the commendation of the righteous are so slightly engrafted in the mind, so coldly received, so distrustfully believed, that they create neither a godly fear of future punishment, nor a lively hope of eternal joy, nor a fixed resolution to live as a Christian : this is but too common ; many believe so coldly and so weakly, that they are themselves no judges of the degree of faith which they possess. Do you believe ? is a question to which all would reply, “ We do.” *But in what*

MANNER ? Does your faith make you earnest, circumspect, careful, diligent ? Examine what kind of faith it is; what it would bear if evil befel you ; if the days of trial were to come ; as they came upon the Christians of old. Is your faith joyful through hope, and rooted in obedience and charity ? Faith in many, slumbers, in many is inactive, and in some absolutely dead. To obtain, then, a living and working (that is) a saving faith, is to have the one great requisite for victory in the trials and crosses which Christians must expect ; and it is this want of true faith which makes so many without improvement. One year is like the last, one day like another, and that increase of hope, and that increase in every christian grace, which are always the fruits of the true christian faith, which are so wanting in many that forty or fifty years makes little or no difference with respect to their religion. Many have just faith enough to meet together in worship, who part to think nothing about it. Many have just faith enough to pray, at least to hear a prayer, who have not enough to work out their salvation, by an inquiry into their own hearts, by any personal self-denial, by any painful endeavour to resist the temptations that beset them and the corruption of their hearts.

Now what can be more obvious and plain than that if we hope for this crown, we must pray earnestly to him who imparts this faith to soften

and purify our hearts, to open our understandings to see the truth; then shall we be enabled to take up our cross. Now to take up the cross is to do whatsoever the word of God commands, however contrary to our weakness, passions, habits, or wishes; it is, therefore, in some to bear patiently the evils of life, and to seek means of relief that are just and right, and these only. If poverty and want of many comforts be our cross, we live in a land of Christians, and where the laws protect, defend, and support those who are unable to help themselves,—not, indeed, to all we may wish or want, but as far as necessity demands, all that in general cases can be given; and to bear this cross as Christians, it is necessary that we be content with what is provided. If we seek to break a law because we think we have not our share of good things, then we take the judgment out of God's hands, and do what we know to be wrong, because we fancy that what is right is not done to us. It is want of faith in such cases that adds guilt to sorrow, and makes want dishonourable. If we firmly believed that the just and righteous God disposed our lot, and knew our temptations, and would reward our patience, and if we earnestly prayed, would confirm our strength and give us grace to resist temptation,—if we thus felt and possessed this faith, want would not cause us to murmur against the dispensations of providence,

much less break the laws of God and man. Sickness and sorrow are the crosses of many, and here still more patience and submission are required in bearing the cross; a confiding, patient trust and reliance on him whose sufferings were so much greater than ours can be—faith in the promise, that they who now go on their way weeping and bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them—that is, they who now believe and trust the promises of God in his holy word, though they be sorrowful, yet if they keep their faith stedfast and sure, and bear their trials, whatsoever they be, in meekness and patience, shall hereafter receive the reward of their faith, and more than they can either hope, or desire, or conceive, as their portion for ever, through the merits of their Redeemer. We have, therefore, to count the cost that we may not deceive ourselves. The Christian *will* have his cross, and must not expect to be without it. In the afflictions of this life, or the temptations, we must look for a call for our resolution; and where our especial cross is, there must we turn our chief attention, and there must strive to conquer, through the grace freely offered to us. Do not let us concern ourselves whether our cross be more or less durable than that of another; do not let us distress our minds because we believe another has the lighter burden, for this we cannot know.

We have above all things to attend to the concerns of our *own* souls and to the means of our own salvation; for if strait be the gate and narrow the way that leadeth unto life, it surely behoves us with all our care to enter in by that gate, to walk in that way, and resolutely to join the few that find it. And again I say, that when you reflect seriously upon *this*, that whether you be a sincere Christian or not, some cross, some vexation and disappointment, some grief or sickness will be yours; when you consider what the most experienced of our brethren have declared to us, that sorrow cannot be escaped even by prudence or care; that disease will reign in spite of temperance, and punishment will ensue where there was no *immediate* crime to call for it; that alarm and trouble will find us in our closest privicy, and that our very caution may lead to the dangers we would fly from; that what we doat upon as a means of happiness will not bring us to the end we look for,—the smoothest course of life has its roughness. In fact, when we are thus informed and thus instructed by the experience of all ages, what should be our resolution? Not, of course, to forsake the world, nor to deny ourselves the innocent and unforbidden enjoyments of life, but our true wisdom lies in this, (and for this purpose only we bring this catalogue of fears, sorrows, afflictions, and temptations before you,) that as

troubles will come whether we choose the way of true religion or not, the *gain* is certain if that blessed path be our choice. We have seen that when torture and excruciating pain was joined with the religion of Christianity, many in vast numbers became and resolutely remained Christians; and will you *now* decline the great and glorious privilege, when no more danger or sorrow, when no more pain than even the world's pleasure itself oftentimes causes, will afflict the body or the soul of the true believer? Surely, then, the sincere Christian not only takes the more wise and virtuous, but the safer, the easier, and the happier lot.

SERMON XV.

THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION.

1 COR. xv. 13, 14.

“ If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen ; and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain.”

THERE may be some events related in the gospels, and some doctrines delivered by the apostles and evangelists, which being taken away would occasion great loss and concern to the christian believer, and yet they would not affect his belief ; but the resurrection of our Redeemer is of that essential, that vital importance, that our hope and faith entirely depend on it. If Christ be not risen, we preach in vain the resurrection of the dead, and not that only, but the whole building of the apostles and evangelists falls with it.

The sacrifice of the death of Christ, merciful

and gracious as the deed was, loses all its worth and glory if it was not followed by his victory over the grave. This may be then accounted the most interesting event that ever the earth exhibited, and the day on which it took place the most triumphant and glorious day : “ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”

Nor need we trouble ourselves as believers because there are some who yet say, “ How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come ?” even though we should not be able to comprehend the reply of St. Paul, nor conceive how a natural body can become spiritual or a corrupt and mortal being assume the glory and power of incorruption and immortality ; this need not give us concern, for as we believe in the event, and know that the power that raised up Jesus can effect all things that divine wisdom and goodness design, we have confidence in the exertion and efficacy of that power, though we be ignorant of the mode of its operation. We need not be afflicted by our ignorance. If that which is sown in dishonour be raised in glory, if that which is sown in weakness be raised in power, it is our comfort and happiness to rejoice in the effect of so wonderful a cause, and to be assured that however

wonderful, it is not beyond the might of his marvellous acts, nor too great for the arm of him who is Almighty.

Whether we shall live in another state of being is to us the first and most important of all concerns,—the only one, indeed, in which all are equally concerned,—nor have we any conception of that mind in any reasonable creatures, who being satisfied that they must soon die are entirely careless whether they shall live again. It is true, we see persons live as if they were thus forgetful, but this cannot be *always*, it cannot be in private, in solitude, in sickness, and (when it may be too late) on a death-bed. *Then* surely all do earnestly wish for a state of rest and a world of comfort—a new life, and a freedom from the pain, care, and anguish that flesh is heir to. And such a hope there is for all the people of God in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Of this doctrine we have a very lively representation in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. The prophet did not know whether the dry bones could live, till the Lord God breathed into them the spirit of life, but he prophesied as he was commanded, and there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them above, but there was no breath,

and the prophet prophesied as he was commanded, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live ;" and then breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

Seeing, then, the vast importance of this doctrine, it is very needful that we feel ourselves assured of its truth—that we firmly and constantly believe "that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust," and that "every one shall receive for the things done in the body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Let us, then, consider that though all the events, miraculous or natural, in the gospels, derive some of their proof from this, and are made of importance to us by it, yet this is also proved by them, and is the concluding event of many preceding, whose truth shows us the truth of the resurrection. This most interesting fact has indeed proof peculiar to itself, and it has the general argument for all gospel truth ; that it is utterly impossible to account for the very being of Christianity upon any principle which does not admit the truth of the facts recorded concerning Christ and the divine authority of his mission.

But I will not take up your time in speaking further of the evidence of the resurrection of our

Lord. Those who disbelieve it are not, I hope, among us, nor are they so numerous now as formerly. Infidelity has lost ground of late years; there was at one time a prevalence of unbelief, but many men of acute minds and sound judgment, friends to religion and their fellow-creatures, defended the faith with powerful and convincing arguments. Reason and devotion, like mercy and truth, met together, and the advocates and abettors of irreligion felt in their turn a shame in their cause and a fear of its defenders.

That triumph of Christianity which we this day commemorate—the resurrection of our Lord and Redeemer from the holds of death—is an event so engrossing, so almost exclusively great, that it leaves room for but one other idea as important—that as God hath raised up Jesus, so also hath he made him Judge of all the earth, and the contemplation of the one ought to stir us up to more earnest preparation for the other. At this season, then, while we give the outward expressions of joy that our Lord is risen, let us be sure that they proceed from a really rejoicing spirit, that is assured of the fact and feels the blessing. It is this assurance and feeling that are indeed the thanksgiving, when not the tongue only, but the heart, rejoices and pays its glad tribute to the Giver of all good, for that best good, the lively hope of everlasting life which we have in Christ Jesus our

Lord. It is but a little time that these outward proofs of rejoicing can last; when we depart from this place, then the psalm ceaseth and the voice is mute, but not therefore is the heart insensible; there may yet remain in us the thankful and joyful remembrance of this great mercy, and, indeed, without this, what is our thanksgiving, what is our praise? They are, like the exterior shows of charity mentioned by St. Paul, as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, profitless and vain.

There are two descriptions of persons who by their peculiar situations are liable to forget the unspeakable blessing that is implied in this hope of a future state,—one by the present happiness which they enjoy, the other by the present misery which they endure. With respect to the former, I do not mean that such persons are really happy, but they are comparatively so, and at least are absorbed and taken up by their perpetually occurring engagements. The hours of the day are filled up; time does not stagnate with them; they have ever some call to obey. There is the employment ready for their leisure, and as soon as one purpose is fulfilled another purpose offers itself. These are the more happy because more employed, and none of that tediousness of life which so many complain of depresses them; their spirits flow in an even tide, and the things about them are of a nature that the mind is pleased with

the view and pursuit of, and in this state it is that a future, a distant, an unexplained, and undefined mode of existence has not power to catch, at least to retain their thoughts and command attention. This is so peculiarly their world, that it will not relax its hold upon their affections and give place to another. They have ever something to consider, something to do, something to enjoy, and the mind shrinks from the contemplation of a future state which is so different from their present, and which must be looked at through the shades of suffering and the gloom of the valley of the shadow of death. These busy and (as I said speaking comparatively) these happy persons, ought to bear in mind that the fleeting and fugitive life which they now enjoy, however pleasant it may be, must soon be over, and that however clouded the prospect of the next world, it must be endless; and this one thought, when through the grace of God it is impressed on the mind, is sufficient for true believers, however engaged they now may be, to lead them to live for that life that shall be eternal.

If we could escape another life by refusing to think of it, that would be ingratitude and folly in the extreme, but as we shall live again whether we exclude it from our minds or not, it is surely little less than madness, voluntary and guilty madness, to shut out the view that has no bounds,

but is, as we make it, an object the most glorious and desirable or the most to be feared and dreaded of all that imagination is able to portray. And again, this great and best hope is equally excluded in many persons by their afflictions and sorrows, by the troubles and cares of the world. We should naturally suppose that the more wretched we are, the more disposed we should be to look into another life for comfort that we cannot find in this; but these sorrows and troubles are present, always felt, always filling the mind with darkness that it will not admit the comfort of the future, always suffusing, as it were, the eye with tears, and hindering the view of distant delight. Pain urges, want presses, sickness enfeebles, or trouble engrosses the spirit, and the cure for all these evils, the everlasting and glorious deliverance, is undistinguished in the confusion that affliction causes. A man in trouble is like one who is drowning in the waters of the ocean; he cannot pierce through the waves that on all sides overwhelm him, and though safety is near him and one well-directed effort would bring him to it, yet he is perplexed by the tumult, and heartless and hopeless in the danger. Here, then, are causes both in our prosperity and our affliction, why eternity is excluded, and a resurrection of the dead made of trifling effect; the present good, the present evil, the pain and pleasure of the reigning

moment, taking possession of our minds, and turning them as they will ! Yet, rightly employed, these, so far from being hindrances, would prove helps to our salvation. Our very pleasures which so engage, our very troubles which so oppress us, might be converted into means and instruments for promoting our everlasting happiness.

Having fixed in our minds the fact that Christ is risen and become the first-fruits of them that slept, having a firm belief that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; we shall then enlist our fears and hopes in the service of this persuasion. Let us consider what the future state will be to us. It will be one of which, though we can form no adequate conception, yet we may be assured that the happiness or affliction of this state of being has no comparison to what we shall then experience. It would be well, then, if from our present condition, whatever it be, we could draw such reflections as would lead us to shun the misery and pursue the happiness of the life to come. Let us form to ourselves a picture of the deepest of earthly sorrows and the highest of earthly joys. First, let us take youth, health, and competence, and give them all to one person, who has judgment and understanding, knowledge and feeling, taste and sensibility. Let there be no compunction for sins committed, no fear for punishment deserved, no grief for misfor-

tune sustained, no sorrow for friends afflicted. Let this happy person enjoy the beauty of a country blessed with fertility, and the intercourse of society cheerful and improving. Still further, let us look on this favoured being as one blessed with the friendship and enjoying the affections of beings like himself. I might, perhaps, add more colouring to the picture, but it is already far beyond real life, and such as though we may conceive we should not be able to discover. But with all this, if it could be found, there is one consideration that not only overclouds, but must finally destroy, all this apparently stable felicity. It is but the felicity of life, and depends upon life for its being and support; what destroys life destroys it; what vexes life and enfeebles it, lessens and debilitates this transitory good; sickness puts it away for a time, and death finally levels it with the things that have been and are not.

But let one more blessing be added to those already mentioned ; make them permanent, make them eternal, and what a value would it give to that happiness ! give all these good things to *mortal* man and they will be lost in his mortality, but give them to man incorruptible and eternal and they will be his for ever and ever. And if the things of this life, health, strength, knowledge, and gratified affections,—if these carried into eternity would render that future state most desirable,

what are we not to think of that sublime happiness, that new, undefined, incomprehensible good, which the children of grace, the followers of the Lamb, shall find their inheritance, when this natural body shall have been raised a spiritual body, and this mortal shall have put on immortality.

And now reverse the picture, and view a creature full of sorrows and wedded to calamity, in pain, poverty, and reproach, feeling acutely, and having only affliction to engage his feelings, deserted where he put his trust, forsaken where he had most affection, his senses unable to taste the beauties and excellencies of art or nature, his judgment clouded by doubts and uncertainties, his spirit vexed by enmity and resentment, the objects of his love become the sources of his sorrow : let us add gloom and despondency, a frowning world without, and a troubled spirit within. This would appear, I think, a very low state of human suffering, and if you will add to this a sense of sin and self-reproach, there is yet one circumstance that could greatly diminish the evil of this state—if it were to last no longer than our present life, if in a few years it were to be no more : but if it were otherwise ; if we suppose a person enduring all that darkness within, that misery without—all the anxiety and loathing of the wounded spirit—all the sorrow and anguish of the troubled heart,

and then add the horrible consideration that this would be eternal, where is the strong and stubborn spirit that could bear such possibility ? Pain and reproach, grief and fear, self-condemnation and hopeless misery, all eternal ! And yet, are we not told that in that state all this and worse shall be endured ? Do we not read of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched ?

What manner of persons, then, brethren, ought we to be for whom so much happiness or so much misery may be allotted !—the glory that eye hath not seen, or the remorse that never ends, the happiness that surpasses imagination, or the fire that is never quenched, the delight that is not to be disturbed, or the torment that is not to be allayed !

This is the alternate view of happiness and misery in this world and the next. Let your earnest attention be given to it ; reflect on the certainty of death and of the resurrection from the dead. Christ is risen, so we shall rise. Let it be our care so to live that we may die in hope that we shall rise to glory. So we shall, if the Spirit that was in Jesus dwell in us ; for St. Paul has shown us that if we have indeed that Spirit—if we be his who bought us by his blood, and brought assurance of hope by his resurrection from the grave—he will also quicken our mortal

bodies by the same Spirit, and that if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

SERMON XVI.

CONSOLATION IN TROUBLE.

HABAK. iii. 17, 18.

“ Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines : the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat : the flock shall be cut off from the field, and there shall be no herd in the stalls : yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

THERE is, perhaps, no one subject in all the sacred Scriptures which either by precept or example is introduced more frequently than affliction and its religious comforts. As every man is born to trouble, every man is in need of consolation, and therefore it concerns him to know where chiefly it is to be found. That there is a very large and even portion of grief might be proved from many arguments ; but I pass them by, and leave those to contradict the assertion who are

certain of their happiness. In our most fond and liveliest satisfaction, in the meetings of conviviality, in the seats of splendour, at the boards of festivity, we may safely appeal to each other if we do not often pause and reflect, when the heart revolting, asks, if this be joy ? But was there ever a time, when in the dwellings of misery, by the bed of anguish, in the habitation of want, by the side of affliction,—in all these was there ever occasion for the mind to hesitate, the heart to inquire, if this be sorrow ? No—pleasure may be thus far imaginary that it flies away when we attempt to analyze and grasp it, but pain and sorrow is real, and will not vanish at the allurements of fancy or the dictates of reason. It becomes us, then, in this common malady, to seek a common alleviation, and this the prophet presents to us in the words of our text, “ Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” In a prayer to God, he describes the terrible consequences of his anger, and speaks of himself as greatly affected by the representation ; he trembled in himself, and wished for rest in the day of trouble; but yet he immediately, in the words of the text, declared his full trust and confidence in his God, and his resolution in distress of every kind not only to abide patiently in the Lord, but to rejoice and have joy in the Rock of his salvation.

Such are the thoughts and purposes of all good and faithful Christians; conscious of their own weakness, they will pray for times of consolation and repose; but conscious, also, of the strength of faith and the enduring mercies of God, they will not murmur in the times of trouble, but rejoice in their God, even in days of trial and affliction. If the days of prosperity and comfort return, they will be (like Job) examples of rewarded trust and resignation, but if their afflictions endure as long as life, then will they repose and die with confidence in the power and promise of their Father in heaven.

I would endeavour, in the first place, to show that in times of distress such as the prophet so powerfully describes, all earthly consolations and all that can be suggested to the grieving spirit, that is not drawn from a religious source, is of very small value and answers no end effectually ; and secondly, to describe what are the comforts afforded by religious principles ; and in pursuance of the subject, I would represent the contrast between the consolations of piety and those which the world can bestow, upon such as look to them for aid in the days of sorrow and calamity.

First, then, what are the comforts which you can draw from this world, suppose you to be in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity ? Will you say that the hope of better

times will take away the evils of the present? No—nor even the certainty of better times, though indeed it would bring relief, could not altogether banish the reigning sorrow; but where is such certainty? We can only hope in our distresses, and worldly hope is soon faint and weary and dies away on any little addition to our care and trouble. That other persons are afflicted is sometimes offered as comfort to us, but we must have evil and envy in our minds if a neighbour's affliction will bring us relief; if this brings any alleviation, it is of a sinful kind, and more likely in the end to add to our burden than to make it lighter. Some persons in their affliction have recourse to the pleasures of sensuality, to intoxication, and the means of turning away the mind from suffering and sorrow; but besides the increase of guilt which arises from such indulgences of the senses, there are intervals of thought, when the sufferings are rendered doubly severe, and all that was gained in a few hours of unlawful pleasures is repaid by a large increase of painful and tormenting reflections. The pity of friends can but little avail us in our sorrows, even when we do not feel displeasure on account of it; but there are persons under trouble whose pride leads them to disdain all pity and compassion from others; but whether we are offended or not by such appearances of regard, we know they cannot much avail us; yet to

be pitiful and courteous St. Peter hath told us, and Job could even ask for it. "Have pity upon me, oh, my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me." But, then, the pity Job begged for was only this, that his friends would not misjudge and trouble him. If, then, worldly comforts fail us, it will be wisdom to learn how far those of religion will contribute to our relief; still premising that we are in distress, "that the fig-tree doth not blossom, neither is any fruit in the vine," religion then gives us this comfort, that if our troubles be distressing they will not be so long. The shortness of life, which is often a painful consideration to the happy, holds out a cheerful view to the weary and heavy-laden Christian; faith has no terrors when it looks at the grave, because it can always look beyond it. Year after year the nearer approach to an eternal home is always consolation to the religious mind in its affliction. 'So much of my sorrowful life is passed, so many of my days of distress are over; a little time and I shall lie down in peace, to suffer no more, but wake in glory.'

Again, there is this great benefit in a state of worldly distress, or any kinds of sorrow, to which the faithful in this their state of trial like others must be subject; that the world being shut out from the soul, all the comforts of faith and religious hope more readily and feelingly enter.

Then it is, as we are taught in the book of Job, “we acquaint ourselves with God;” then “thou shalt have delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto thy God.” It is of such religious persons our Lord spake: “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted;” and St. Paul said, “Blessed be the God of all comfort, who hath comforted us in our tribulations, that we may be able also to comfort them in trouble.” We also read in St. John that our sorrow shall be turned into joy, and St. Peter writeth, that “believing in Christ ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;” and of old it was sung, “He that soweth in tears shall reap in joy.” Can we wonder, then, that the Christian, in sorrow, sickness, and trouble, should look so earnestly that way whence his help cometh, and that earnestly looking he should both see and feel it? This is the time for effectual prayer and the comfort of true piety: Is any in trouble let him pray; not that prayer should not be a resource at all times, but that in trouble prayer is an especial remedy, and in itself a support and comfort. At such times men seem to be forsaken of the world, and therefore more especially lift up their eyes to the God of consolation; then, too, is the time when the higher and holier thoughts which arise from true faith and trust in the Redeemer, have their pure and divine influence—the happiness of heaven,

though not revealed, is believed; “it doth not yet appear,” St. John saith, “what we shall be, but we shall be like him, (our Lord,) and shall see him as he is—who shall say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.” Such words *then* make their *strong* impression ; they do not just enter in at the ear and pass away ; and the saying of the prophet also will then have its due weight, who is speaking of the glory to come : “The inhabitants of that place shall not say I am sick, and the people that dwell there shall be forgiven their iniquity ;” there sorrow and sighing shall flee away ; there “the sun no more shall be thy light by day, neither shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God, thy glory.” These are the words and these the comforts and meditations of the religious mind, in the seasons of trouble, sickness, and adversity, and you will judge whether the world can boast any such consolations.

Now, as was proposed, let us compare the state of mind in the two kinds of persons in their distresses, because in those the world is sometimes not without its consolations and assistance, with respect to the comforts which may be occasionally found in this world. No man has opinion of sin and error, but that he inclines to assist and relieve the upright and conscientious ; even the

wicked do not favour the persons like themselves, but rather show (if not a partiality and love for) yet a respect and regard for such as live virtuously. The evil, then, and unjust, in *their* troubles have not the consolation of friends to support them ; at least they have not the same likelihood of acquiring them. Again, men's good spirits, given by nature, are a support in some cases and at some times ; but it is not likely that these strong and lively spirits should bear them up at such seasons of affliction, if they are not supported also by the answer of a good conscience, and reliance upon a merciful God. The high spirits of strong health fail in the days of continued and repeated trouble, in the nights of pain, in the hours of reflection, on the approach of want, and the prospect of death ; but the pious have a support which cannot fail, that is, sincere faith. Nor does their native strength of mind, if they possess it, their cheerfulness, and the comfort of a kind and social temper, leave them in *their* adversity ; they not only live, but they die cheerfully ; their spirits rise when the joy and gladness of the sinful and negligent turn to melancholy, remorse, and despair. It would instruct numbers who dread the times of adversity, if they could see how religious minds not only supported the weight, but could rejoice beneath it.

Again, as I have already mentioned, devout

persons draw comfort from the shortness of life ; but what can the wicked see in the prospect but misery increasing ? The shortness of life is so far from comfort, that they can but wish their past days, *evil* as they have been, and productive of evil, to return again—in all their guilt, with all their misery ; nay, they can bear the present sorrow better than their fears for their state hereafter. And what a miserable situation is that, wherein being now in affliction and distress, we yet look forward, not with a lively hope of relief, but with a foreboding fear of additional anguish ; here, in the present life, the thought is terrible and the feelings oppressive, but *there*, in the life to come, the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Hence it is, that his misery to the wicked man increases his love for life, as the gamester's ill luck makes him more eager in his ruin ; both are desperate, and depend on improbabilities and hope, where no reasonable prospect for it can be indulged. But a religious man knows what he has to depend upon ; he trusts his peace to no accident, he looks only to that hope which the chances of life and the capriciousness of fortune cannot take away.

Another great distinction between the troubles of the religious and the unrepenting is this, that the wicked more commonly bring their troubles upon themselves ; they are then to him not so

much trials as punishments, not to prove what he can do, but to convince him of what he *has* done : but the afflictions and troubles of the religious and devout person are really trials, and will conduce to his present or his eternal welfare. Another source of comfort is, from the reflection that such persons have, when they think of their intercourse and dealings with whomsoever they have had concern or relation, they have deliberately injured none, and are thus spared remorse of conscience ; to some they have been kind and benevolent, and hence a measure of comfort ; they have meted rightly, and it will in large measure be dealt to them again. Now the injuries to his fellow-creatures is one great cause of disquiet to the mind of him who has done evil ; his misery is his own, his own conduct brought it upon him, his own crimes were the purchase : from this consideration must arise anxious, fruitless, and miserable thoughts ; passionate and lamentable, but unavailing complaints.

There is one more point of view in which we will place both these persons, and that is, on the bed of sickness, at the hour of death, and let both be poor in circumstances, both in some degree of pain, friendless, and without effectual support ; with no worldly comforts, with no outward prospects of alleviation or redress, much less of recovery from sickness ; though alike in all things

relating to this life, or arising from it, or terminating in it, yet they are as widely differing, as fancy can paint or experience verify—for in the one the sinful unrepenting unconverted man is a principle depraved and sensual, and a prospect hopeless and miserable ; and, in the other, a principle of faith and rectitude, and a prospect of boundless felicity and glory.

Let things be thus considered, and all who will make use of their judgment will surely choose the better part, but our great and general error is, that so few judge that to be true of themselves which is not told particularly of them ; a general description does not affect them, and a particular one who shall give ? All this death-bed scenery appears to many light and inconsiderate minds like the account of some far distant, some dull, some uninteresting country, and they coolly look at a view of travellers passing through it ; but, on the contrary, it should be as the just description of that place to which we all must come, and to which so many of us are almost immediately coming—the land wherein is the shadow of death, the situation in which is the prospect of eternity. And in that land, and in that situation, if we compare the varying states of life, that of prosperity and adversity, plenty and want, what is the difference ? Then let us learn to estimate rightly our best wealth, and never be willing to pay a vast

price (the peace of our conscience, and the salvation of our soul,) for so miserable a purchase as any sensual pleasure or earthly advantage. Be warned to escape the miseries which at that awful time are so hard to be borne, the pangs of a wounded spirit, the terrors of foreboding fear, that when the evil days be coming, you may be easy, nay, happy, in your reflections, and the peace of God may dwell in your heart.

Not many of us can live long, a few winters' cold, a few summers' suns ! yet another time for sowing, yet another harvest, and all is over. And shall we for these, for so little, be so very careful, and yet let our eternal interest, our first and great concern, pass from our minds as if it were of less value, and even below our consideration ? Suppose the continuance of life be what you may reasonably expect, or what you unreasonably look for, still the end must come. Now is the time to choose whether you will make it miserable or happy. Wise and blessed are they who will take their thoughts from the world and its advantages, to look at the past, wherein friends have departed, and neighbours are almost forgotten, to look both backward and forward in the stream of time, till at length they can fix the mind and heart upon that ocean of eternity which we were created to possess, though unable to conceive. If we would do this earnestly and frequently, as it ought to be

done, it would help to rectify numbers of our opinions and estimations that are injurious to us ; we should learn to look calmly on this world, and most earnestly on a better, so that in times of prosperity, and when, as we say, fortune smiles upon us, we should not be seduced into folly, and in times of adversity, when she frowns, we should never be driven to despair, but can take up the exultation of the prophet, “ Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

SERMON XVII.

THE HOLY COMMUNION.

1 COR. x. 16.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”

THE word communion means fellowship, the common participation of anything; and in this particular case the general receiving among believers of the bread and wine, which are the representations and emblems of Christ’s body which was given, and of his blood which was shed for us. By the religious participation of these we show forth his death and passion until his coming again.

The explanation of this sacrament is given in the catechism, which explanation, as far as it goes, is just and excellent; but its extreme brevity in some points requires a further elucidation

and enlargement. As it was intended to be committed to memory, it is necessarily short ; but this necessity in some degree enforces another, and renders it expedient for us to dwell upon some of the subjects which are connected with a rite of so much importance as the sacrament of the Supper of the Lord. Still it is the catechism that I shall make the foundation of all that I have to observe, and will begin with the question which there introduces the subject, “ What meanest thou by this word sacrament ?”

The answer is, “ I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us, ordained by Christ himself as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.”

It follows, then, that there are two parts in a sacrament, the outward and visible sign, and the inward and spiritual grace.

Now this definition of a sacrament excludes certain other rites and forms which the Church of Rome has received as sacraments, namely, confirmation, penance, holy orders, matrimony, and extreme unction, which, as our 25th article expresses it, are “ such as have grown partly out of corrupt following of the apostles, and partly are states of life which are allowed in the Scriptures, but which have not like nature with the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper,” that is,

they have not an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, and ordained by Christ himself.

The two which answer to this definition are baptism and the Supper of the Lord. It is this last which at the present calls for our most serious attention. Again, it is asked in the catechism, “Why was the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper ordained?” and the answer is, “For the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby.” This is in conformity with what our Lord himself has said, “Do this as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me;” and thus doing, we are told that we show forth the Lord’s death till he come. This is one reason for the observance of this ordinance. It is an act of obedience and gratitude; and a second is because of the benefits which we receive in this act of duty. If, then, by a participation of this sacrament, we both receive benefits to our souls, and perform an act of thanksgiving and obedience to our Lord and Redeemer, how is it to be accounted for that comparatively few among our brethren are partakers of the holy communion? There is reason to believe that many serious but fearful persons have been deterred by the apparently severe denunciation of the apostle, that they who eat and drink unworthily, eat and drink damnation to themselves, not

considering the Lord's body ; but this has been explained in books and tracts written upon the subject, and learned people have assured us that the word which our translators render "damnation," means in this place not the final award, but judgment or condemnation in this world, as the apostle says, " For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

Perhaps it may appear to some that this explanation was given for the sake of some timid Christians who have consciences that are easily offended ; but they may be assured that it is not so. This explanation of the word is the true one ; nor would such men as have thus explained it have on any consideration stepped aside from the very truth, nor done anything wrong that good might come of it. Archbishop Secker was one of these ; and there were others equally careful and conscientious, so that we may rest satisfied that St. Paul meant no more than that kind of condemnation which the faults of eating and drinking so irreverently as he describes brought upon those who did so in the present world.

And another reason why such apprehensions should be laid aside is, that no such fault is ever committed among ourselves ; we may indeed have a coldness and want of inward sanctity and reverence, but none assuredly have that outward levity and disorder which the apostle condemns, so that

with respect to our congregations that part of the epistle which relates to this circumstance has no other reference than as it serves for a general admonition to us all, that we go to the Lord's table with reverence and godly fear, with solemn consideration of the act which we are about to perform. But though it may be true that the idea of this tremendous danger in the unworthy participation of the holy communion may have kept, and still may keep, some part of our congregation from the performance of this duty, yet that cannot be the sole cause of backwardness, for many absent themselves from the communion who do not fear after the manner of the weak and apprehensive Christian. What, then, are the reasons of their omitting a duty enjoined, and refusing a benefit offered to them? In some I believe this is a cause, that they feel conscious that on the whole their way of life, their daily manners and habits, are not those of the true and earnest believer; and they are kept from the duty not so much by fear of punishment—for if that were true they would be afraid on account of their habitual disobedience—but they look upon the receiving the holy sacrament as a kind of pledge and promise of a more serious and religious life than that which they now live; and as they cannot with full heart and mind purpose to lead such life, they are loth to perform an act which in some

degree pledges them to it. The folly and weakness of such way of reasoning is evident ; these persons neglect to perform a solemn duty because they have no mind at present to live in conformity with it, and so they will forbear what is right lest it should be a reproof to them afterwards ; they would be consistently careless, and not obey in one particular, for fear their own consciences should compel them to be obedient in others. Such is the rash and dangerous neglect of those who, knowing what is the right way, will not enter in because they cannot in their hearts resolve to proceed.

We know there are some even serious persons who defer this duty of receiving the holy sacrament till a later period of their lives, when they shall be more disengaged from the business, cares, and duties of the present world ; but this is most unreasonable and wrong. For one design of our receiving is the strengthening and refreshing of the soul ; this then is lost, just at the very time when it is most wanted, amid the temptations that continually beset us. Seldom do we more stand in need of the strength thus received, than when we are engaged by the very things which prevent our seeking it in this way ; for the devout observance of this duty would greatly aid us to withstand temptation, and tend to preserve us

from the errors and frailties to which, amidst the busy occupations of the world, we are so liable.

To return : we are further instructed on this subject in the catechism as follows : “ What is the outward part or sign in the Lord’s Supper ?” and “ What is the inward part or thing signified ?”

Of the former of these questions we have now no need to speak. The answer to the latter is, “ The body and blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s Supper.”

When it is said that the body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received, the meaning is, that the *benefits* of them, of the crucifixion of that body, and the shedding of that blood, are so received. But you will ask, ‘ Why not then so express it ?’

The reason is, that the compilers of our Liturgy thought it to be right to abide by the words of our Redeemer, and rather to hazard some small obscurity than to deviate from them ; but a recollection of our Lord’s own words under the circumstances, in which he partook of the passover with his disciples, will convince us that by the body and blood of Christ must be signified the benefits of his passion, and these only. For when the Lord said, presenting the bread, “ Take, eat, this is my body ;” and when offering the cup, he

added, “ Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins ; do this as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me.” When our Lord thus spake, he was with his disciples personally, and therefore his meaning could not by them be misunderstood, namely, “ This bread and this wine are emblems and signs of my body and blood, and by means of these you and all the faithful hereafter may show forth my death, and be partakers of all the benefits of my sacrifice.’

The question that follows is this, “ What are the benefits which we receive thereby ?” and it is answered, “ The strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the bread and wine.” By the strengthening and refreshing of our souls is meant the establishing them in all virtue and godliness of living, and the enlivening and comforting them in all trials and afflictions ; and our purpose is to learn how this confirmation and support are to be derived. The answer is, By a lively faith in the sacrifice which we are thus commemorating, and by a due preparation for the discharge of the duty ; and this leads to the last and most important question in our church catechism, “ What is required of those who come to the Lord’s Supper ?” The answer we will consider in its several parts, and first, they are “ to examine themselves

whether they repent them truly of their former sins." This is the first step in our preparation, and they only can think it an easy one who have not yet tried it. If the question were addressed to us individually, Have you repented truly of your former sins? it would assuredly be to many a startling question, while to others it would admit a ready, and in many cases a cheerful reply, for they know and feel that they *have* truly repented.

This must be left, however, to every one's own conscience; we cannot know how it is with another, neither ought we to judge when we cannot determine, and when, if we could, we can do no more than advise, and show the sin and danger of living without repentance.

The subject of repentance is one of too much importance, and is too complicated for us to discuss fully at the present time. All that I can now do is earnestly to recommend it to your most anxious consideration, whether you have truly repented or not, whether, at any period of your life, you have been struck with alarm by any event on account of your sins, or by any other means have been brought to reflect upon them; your sins against God, your neighbour, and yourself; your impiety and neglect of the soul's welfare; your deliberate injustice or want of benevolence and charity; your intemperance, or too exclusive self-love and self-indulgence. If these,

or other offences, are on record against you, your conscience also bearing witness that you are verily and indeed guilty, we must not only say to you in the words of the exhortation of our Church, “Repent, or come not to that holy table,” but repent, or hope not to enter into life eternal.

It is not, however, likely that persons whose consciences are burdened with gross and scandalous offences, would in general presume to join the more serious part of a congregation in an act of duty held in so much reverence as this holy sacrament. The repentance to which those who are really awakened and earnest are exhorted is, a devout and sober reflection upon the infirmities and omissions which they are conscious of, and which their habit of self-examination readily presents to their memory, and their seriousness and real piety make them feel with sorrow and self-reproach. In regard of their duty to God, they may have to lament that they have had irregular, presumptuous, or degrading thoughts of him ; that they have been forgetful or negligent, or that doubts and unbelief have entered into their minds. As to their duty to mankind, though they cannot be guilty of deliberate cruelty, injustice, or of injuring with design the body or soul of their neighbour, yet they may have given way to hard thoughts, uttered impatient expressions, or been guilty of other inconsiderate offences ; and

as respects themselves, though they may have been free from grosser vices, yet they may have been too self-indulgent ; may have thought too highly of themselves, or what relates to themselves ; may have yielded to the suggestions of vanity, or entered with too much eagerness into their pursuits, or pleasure, or profit ; and these, or like offences, are the subjects for painful reflection and sincere repentance in those who would go to this sacrament, and would not go without real preparation.

There is next required of us a stedfast purpose to lead a new life, that is, a godly and consistent life ; and this indeed is included, strictly speaking, in repentance for the past ; for if our repentance be true, it will unquestionably cause and confirm in us a resolution to forsake everything that is displeasing to God. We are moreover required “to have a lively faith in God’s mercy through Christ.” Hardly any one, perhaps, would come to the Lord’s table, or into his church, without some kind of belief in the truth of religion ; but this is not to be confounded with the lively faith that is here spoken of, which is an humble and earnest reliance on the promises of God, which are given to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is added, “With a thankful remembrance of his death.” This we shall have in proportion as we think of, and are impressed by, this

important subject. If we do not love to meditate upon the Saviour's sufferings, upon their design and consequences to the world and to ourselves, we shall not feel that lively interest in them which will make us sincerely and heartily thankful ; and it is to stir up within us such devout and grateful sensations that we are called to prayer, or admonished to read in the gospels of what Christ underwent for the sins of the world.

“ To be in perfect charity with all men,” is the last mentioned requisite for a fit communicant ; a duty which we find more light or severe, according to our difference of temper or disposition ; for some are of so easy a nature that they do not feel it very trying to forgive, and some are by nature so vindictive as to feel the duty of forgiveness one of the most difficult that they have to perform. But of the duty itself no one can question who remembers our Lord’s precepts, “ I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them which curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.”

Thus does our blessed Lord command the duty of forgiveness of injuries, and upon the general subject of showing kindness and charity towards all men, we have many similar injunctions, as, for instance, “ Give to him that asketh thee, or from

him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." " And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." Such, then, is the preparation required of those who come to the Lord's Supper. Such also is the preparation for a life of holiness and virtue, and such is the preparation for a death-bed of peace, resignation, and comfort.

SERMON XVIII.

CHRISTIAN HUMILITY.

1 Pet. v. 6.

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

IT is not an easy thing to be truly humble, but it is a very easy and common thing to express a humility that is not true. The difference between true and false humility is not in appearance : so far as it is expressed by outward and visible signs, the one may resemble the other in a great measure. To say that we are poor vile and miserable offenders, may be an act of humility of either kind ; to kneel down and solemnly beg forgiveness is becoming, natural, and proper ; to appear dejected and sorrowful, repentant and abased, is the part of one who is conscious of sin and unworthiness, and I might go on and point out

many other tokens of penitence and humility, but still none of these, nor all together, are *proofs* of that humbled spirit which Christianity requires, and which is so well pleasing in the sight of our Creator.

The distinction is, that humility in the one case, the false humility, goes no further than the tokens and expressions, and, in the other the true ; it proceeds from a contrite spirit, and is accompanied, not only by sincere repentance, but by “works meet for it,” by unfeigned sorrow for sin and earnest amendment of life. False humility produces false security ; for it is very natural for those who think they are humble in heart, when they are only humble in manner and form, to think also they are secure when they are only confident.

We must, therefore, guard against this deceit of false security and all our too confident hopes and unscriptural expectations by careful inspection of our hearts, vigilance in our conduct, and judgment of ourselves, which are so necessary for all who would be truly humble. True christians are so far from being presuming and confident, that they even lose the recollection of their good works in the sense of their sins and omissions. “ When saw we thee an hungered, or thirsty, or sick, or in prison ?” is described as the language of the righteous by our Lord in his representation of the

judgment-day, they are sensible of many sins and infirmities, though not of habitual and obstinate transgressions. Thence true Christians are always more disposed to look at the dark than the bright side of their conduct. They do not flatter themselves with a few duties imperfectly performed, but rather lament that imperfection and the neglect of numberless opportunities of growing in grace and goodness. When, therefore, the Christian's heart would represent his conduct as meritorious, he corrects its vanity by a more just account. If your heart should lay before you your duties performed, your temptations resisted, your particular acts of piety and your general good conduct, and if you are tempted to draw any vain or presumptuous confidence from this, you must consider, on the other hand, the duties neglected or slightly fulfilled, the temptations not resisted, or in part complied with, the coldness and wavering of your religious affections, and all the errors, wanderings, and frailties of your life. There is no one who duly considers and weighs himself in a fair balance but must know and feel his multiplied deficiencies. No one who looks within himself will stand or be willing to stand by his own merits ; the deeper he looks, the more he will find of weakness and sin, and he will be more inclined (even if his life be more than commonly reputable or clean) to despair of mercy for

his provocations than to hope for acceptance without it. There have been proud and reasoning sinners who, on balancing (in their way) the good and evil of their conduct, not only acquit, but applaud themselves for an overplus of good works ; but you will not find a true Christian doing this ; he is too deeply sensible of his sinfulness and weakness, the good suggestions which he has neglected, the evil ones which he has followed ; he is sensible, not only of the outward acts by which he has displeased God, but of a naturally corrupt and slothful will ; he remembers his backwardness and disinclination to pray, his many and idle delays, the imperfection of his best doings, his secret pride, sensuality, obstinacy, or perverseness. All this and much more is perceived in himself by the humble and self-abasing Christian ; but the self-acquitting moralist passes over all this, he looks to an act of sin which it may be he calls frailty, and to an act of benevolence which he thinks meritorious, and so he draws a balance in his favour, and thinks, nay, is most confident, that he stands securely beyond the reach of danger.

That you may see the deceitful nature of this false security, and the truly humble spirit of a believer who works out his salvation with fear and trembling, with pious and patient spirit. Consider the examples of good and holy men of old. Abraham, the father of nations, a righteous

as well as a mighty man ; highly revered by his fellow-creatures, highly favoured of Almighty God, chosen and called for an especial purpose,—this holy and venerable person, in his own opinion, was a poor and sinful creature. “Behold,” said he, “I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord which am but dust and ashes.” And this, after he had received such favours and honours, that no prince on earth had the least pretension to be his equal. So humble a spirit has true piety. What did Jacob say when, after many years of hard and personal servitude, he was travelling with his flocks and herds, his wives and children, his many possessions and great household, all which many would have said were the fruit of his own industry and care ; but he knew better what they were and said, “O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant.” Of the deep humility and exemplary patience of Job we all know ; for though he persisted in affirming his righteousness, yet that was not to justify himself before God as a man who had never offended, but it was an argument against his accusers, in which he asserted that no private sins, no hypocritical wickedness, as they supposed, had brought the heavy judgments of the Almighty upon him, but unto God he saith,

“ I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men ;” “ I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Of the humbled feelings of David and Solomon we may be perfectly assured by reading the Psalms and the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes ; and everywhere in the Word of God, self-abasement and humility, a lowly and contrite spirit, are spoken of as among the signs of a true and faithful servant of God, while pride and self-righteousness are joined with folly and wickedness, both in their nature and in their punishment.

But it is in the blessed gospel that we see both by precept and example the true spirit of the humble man. By precept thus,—“ Blessed are the meek,”—“ the poor in spirit,”—“ Whosoever shall humble himself, (truly, that is, from his heart) shall be exalted,”—“ Whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is great,”—“ When ye have done all, say we are unprofitable servants.” This last declaration applies very strongly to our present subject, for you find if all we can do were done, we are unprofitable ; how much then are we less than this ? how worthless the best of us, for who has done all he might have done ? which of us has taken every occasion of doing good ? which of us has not taken any occasion of doing evil ? are we not worse than unprofitable ? what are our merits ? what is our

righteousness ? where is the support we have provided ourselves that we may stand in the day of judgment ?

But see also this humble spirit exemplified by the followers of Jesus. “Depart from me,” said St. Peter, “I am a sinful man, O Lord.” It is true that this apostle in an unguarded hour, elated with the high distinction which had been conferred on him a little before, took upon him to be wiser than his Master and to rebuke him ; and on another occasion he showed too much confidence in his own stedfastness and attachment to his Lord, when he declared himself ready to go with him in spite of all opposition, and even to die in his company. We all know what sad experience he soon had of his own weakness ; but we know too how deeply he was humbled, and how bitterly he wept for his presumption.

Again,—there is nothing perhaps which could give a man greater conceit of his own holiness than the power of working miracles. The disciples of our blessed Saviour had this power, yet you do not see in them anything of pride or self-justification on account of it. When Peter and John had cured the cripple who had been laid at the gate of the temple, we find them thus addressing the wondering multitude,—“Why marvel ye at this ? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ?”

St. Paul, who was so eminent for his labours and sufferings, and for “the abundance of the revelations” which he received of the Lord, writes thus of himself,—“ Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given ;” and when on one occasion he was, for his argument sake, in a manner forced to commend himself, he adds a remark on the folly and vain glory of all such things,—“ I speak as a fool,” saith he ; “ ye constrain me.” “ If we confess our sins,” saith St. John, “ God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

We have now, it is hoped, sufficiently seen the necessity of true humbleness of mind, of the godly fear and reverential awe that it behoves us to have if we would be Christians indeed, so that we may learn how necessary it is for us, if we think we stand, to take heed *how* we stand—to be sure that our confidence is well-placed—that we are not presumptuous and self-righteous like the Pharisee, but penitent self-accusers as the poor publican, yet not only self-accusers and penitent, but self-correctors, and bringing forth fruit meet for repentance. It may perhaps appear to some, that in condemning self-righteousness we are speaking of an error that is by no means common, for that in general, men are ready enough to confess their sins, and to own themselves unfruitful and unprofitable servants, and to trust in the merits and

mercies of their Saviour. Our public confession, it may be thought, will prove this,—nay, whenever there is any conversation upon the subject, we always hear, above all things, this confession, that all are sinners before God. All are ready to acknowledge that they “have done the things which they ought not to have done, and have left undone the things which they ought to have done, and that there is no health in them.” All this is true. We repeat this often, every sabbath most of us, and some much oftener ; but still this confession so full, so deeply humble, is it not often made by the most presumptuous and the most careless, by those who regard not one word of all they are saying ?

What, my brethren, are mere words ? It is the mind, the will, the understanding, the affections that make these an act of devotion, or an act of presumption. Thousands who repeat this humbling form are yet standing on their own lofty ground, are Pharisees in heart, with the words of the publican.

See, then, that your confession is from the heart, that your repentance is sincere, your faith real and earnest, not a cold lifeless consent to the articles of a creed, but an humble and stedfast reliance on the merits of your Redeemer. Think with grateful remembrance of all that he has done and suffered for a sinful world, and that all

this has been done for you, that though millions of your fellow-sinners be saved by his sacrifice, yet the blessed effect on you is just the same as if he had suffered for you alone ; and if so, how great ought your thankfulness to be ! Let your reflection on the evil of your life, and the evil of your nature, and your sorrow on account of these, be effectual in leading you resolutely to contend against them. No one who truly strives to serve God but must feel the perpetual opposition of his rebellious nature, his sinful desires, his doubts and fears, the unwillingness of his heart for this holy work ; and while he feels this evil bias, he cannot but sincerely grieve on account of it. Let it be your stedfast and unwearied purpose to fight against this evil and to overcome it. Prove yourself a true follower of Jesus Christ. Make it the great care and business of your life to be obedient to his will, and show the grateful spirit of a redeemed creature, of one that is rescued from ruin by a merciful Saviour who died for our sins, and who is now preparing a place of happiness and honour for his people, to which he will exalt them in due time.

SERMON XIX.

SELF-JUSTIFICATION.

LUKE x. 29.

“ But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”

CAN any presume to stand acquitted of sin when he is judged of his God? or can he make out any justification of his life, even though it may have been so unusually correct that his fellow-sinners can lay nothing to his charge but what to them he might be able to vindicate or justify? for the judgment of God reacheth the heart, and bringeth forth every secret sin and every transgression and offence which the transgressor himself may have been accustomed to pass over. Self-righteousness, indeed, is what no christian professes; but notwithstanding this, many excuse their offences who do not justify themselves by

their merits. They do not presume on the goodness, the integrity, the purity, that is within them, for they are conscious that this cannot be done ; but they do make many excuses for the sins they commit, and find out many ways of acquitting themselves from their many transgressions.

There are, then, two parts of self-justification,—one respects our duty, the other our neglect of duty. First, we may judge too favourably of our state of mind, manner of life, our good deeds, our religious duties, as well as those which relate to our fellow-creatures and ourselves. We may think too highly of our faith, our hope, and our charity, and may draw a very flattering conclusion from all we judge of ourselves, our thoughts, words, and works. Secondly, we may equally mistake in our judgment of what we have done amiss, or the good we have neglected to do, and may form such excuses for our sins and our omission of duty, that it may seem in many cases as if we rather deserved pity for our mistakes than punishment for our transgressions.

I will now ask your attention to these false excuses, this self-justification, this proneness of our hearts to acquit us of that which conscience brings in view before us, our sins and frailties, the evil we have done, and the good we have omitted to do. This self-excuse is an error of great antiquity ; it stands one of the first upon record,—

"Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Offending Adam replied,—"The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." And Eve said,—"The serpent beguiled me." There is a deformity, a hatefulness in sin, that scarcely any one but the very hardened and abandoned can bear the thought of their own guilt, and so they try to make it appear less odious or more excusable. It is so bad in itself, that men's fear and self-love induce them to cloathe and disguise it, that they may be less ashamed of their offences, and less afraid of their disobedience.

I shall especially dwell on two kinds of excuses, or self-justification. First, there are some persons who find excuse for a wicked life, in their early habits and the sinfulness of those who had the forming of them. Their parents, they say, were careless and irreligious, and taught them evil by their example; their companions were sinners, and all their habits and indulgencies sinful. They were not trained in virtue and religion, and therefore it is not wonderful that they go astray. Perhaps they may add to all this, that they were brought up in poverty, and were compelled to earn the bread that nourishes the body, which left them no time for attention to the concerns of the soul; but there is deceit in all this, and those

who make such excuses for a sinful life are deceivers of themselves. They speak of the wicked example they have had, of their wicked companions, of careless parents, and evil habits. Why, THEN, they must have known what wickedness is ; they must have known that such companions were wicked ; they must have known much that their parents omitted to do for them, and with this they must have known the evil of those habits which they had contracted and now condemn ; And if they knew these things in any degree ; if they were thus acquainted with good and evil ; are they not conscious of offending a just and righteous Lord by doing that which he has forbidden, and by neglecting to do that which he hath commanded ? No person in a christian land is brought up and trained in sinful habits, and *those only*, children of the most negligent parents associate with others, and as they grow up, they mark and learn and distinguish what passes around them. They learn good and evil, and they early, very early, feel the distinction ; they have a conscience that accuses or acquits them. If they are drawn in to do wickedly, they know and feel that they deserve punishment ; and however they may have been neglected by their fathers and mothers, the world itself has been a school to them, and the fears and terrors, the pains and punishment of guilty men have impressed upon

their minds, that if they sin they must likewise suffer; they see or hear of an offender against the laws of God and man, condemned to shame and punishment; and is not this a lesson that deeply imprints the law of God upon the heart?

We must not, then, look upon the neglect of persons by their parents, or the early habits contracted by themselves,—we must not look upon the bad example which they continually behold, or the sinful companions of their youth, as forming just excuses for their transgressions, their disobedience to the commandments of their God, or their pernicious and wicked habits of intemperance, or dishonesty, or any other crime. Perhaps it may be asked whether there is not more excuse for such, brought up in this neglect with bad examples and evil companions, than there is for the offenders of another class, the children of prosperous and wealthy parents, who were regularly taught from their infancy what was right, and who were trained up in the way they should go while yet in their childhood, that when they became men and women they might not depart from it? Who are most excusable must depend on the peculiar nature of their crimes, and the circumstances under which they were committed. In many cases the danger is much more equal than might be supposed,—the children of the wealthy

see bad examples, though under different manners; the sins around them are often the same, though under different forms. The intoxicating spirits of the poor and the sparkling poison of the rich have the same effect, and give birth to the same evil passions; and who shall decide which is most offensive? The discourse which is subversive of all earnest religion which is too frequently heard in the society of some in the upper classes, or the swearing and awful appeals to God in the attestation of falsehood which are so frequently found among the irreligious and uneducated. Temptations and trials are prepared for all,—you cannot escape,—no station or rank is free from them. There is no excuse, then, for a wicked life in the disadvantages of station.

Secondly. Among the excuses made by transgressors against the will and commandment of God is a want of education or of learning. How often has this reply been made when a person has been accused of doing that which he ought not to have done, “he had no learning!” Did he require any to tell him that he offended his God when he broke his commandments? If learning were needed to understand the will of God, ignorance might be pleaded when it was disobeyed. Who is ignorant, when he commits a sin, that he merits punishment? Yet we repeatedly hear, in excuse for the sins and crimes of persons in the lower

stations of society that “they had no learning.” Is learning a preservative against sin? Do not learned persons sometimes grievously offend against God’s holy will and commandments? Do not many unlearned and single-hearted persons reverence and keep them? There is no such excuse as these offenders would take to themselves. God knoweth their hearts, and they also know when they do that which they ought not to do that they are guilty and have *wilfully* broken the law by which they were to be directed and will be judged. All have knowledge of good and evil, and dearly have men paid for the knowledge; but they *have it*, and when they commit sin, when they are guilty of profaneness and want of all reverence to God, of dishonouring the sabbath and refusing to hearken to the Scriptures, if they waste that holy day in self-indulgence or idleness, if they are guilty of dishonest and fraudulent practices, of falsehood, injustice, or robbery; if they consume what they acquire in selfish and intemperate gratifications, leaving their family in want, or waste the allotted time of trial and neglect religious preparation;—if they do these things, or things of like evil kind, can any one single individual plead ignorance and want of learning in excuse? No one is ignorant whether he leads an ungodly and wicked life. All sin is wilful, and who that transgresses the law of God can justly plead, “I knew not that I offended?”

Do the holy laws of God require any study that is denied to *any* man ? Thou shalt not steal ; thou shalt not commit adultery ; thou shalt not bear false witness ; thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath-day ; thou shalt repent thee truly of all thy sins, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world ;—is this a matter of difficulty to understand ? Can we not all comprehend it ? And when we offend in any one respect against the holy commandment, are we not convinced, and does not our conscience inform us, that *we* are transgressors ? But some persons might perhaps reply, We know all this, we acknowledge our transgressions, and we look for pardon, not by our own good life or good works, but solely through the merits and satisfaction, the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of man, by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will readily allow this plea, if the offender (whoever he be) can sincerely add, “ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world ;” for says the apostle this only of himself ? He adds, “ And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

Now if the world be crucified unto you, you are dead unto it, having neither affections nor inclinations for its pomps and vanities, its dangerous pleasures, and sinful indulgences,—to all it holds out to tempt your carnal affections, your evil pas-

sions, and to entice and draw you from the narrow into the broad path by its allurements, temptations, seductions, and deceptions. These are so crucified and dead and buried to you, that you are no longer a slave to any sinful habits, nor feel the bondage of anything the world can hold out to impose upon or deceive you. Understand you this ? Is the world so crucified unto you ? But further, are you crucified to the world ? Is your pride mortified, so that you are become humble as a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, meek and lowly, patient, enduring reproach and enmities as a Christian ? Are you crucified in spirit, gentle, peaceable, forgiving, easy to be entreated ? Have you that charity of heart which the apostle Paul describes as indispensable to the Christian, which hopeth, believeth, endureth ? Have you crucified the flesh with the desires and incitements that lead to sin ? Are those worldly affections subdued which led you to covet and desire that which was not your own ? Do you, in heart and will, yield unto all, that which you would reasonably desire should be yielded unto you ? Have you crucified and buried in you all angry, revengeful, and malignant gratifications of the carnal mind ? all hatred, scorn, and contempt of your fellow-creatures ? and have justice, and charity, and brotherly love reigned in their stead ?

Again, I ask you, are you thus crucified unto the world and the world unto you? We are not asking whether you have equalled the holy apostle in the *degree* with which he crucified himself, and became dead unto the world, but whether you have the same holy and christian principle—whether you have tried, and with all your heart *sincerely* endeavoured to be thus conformed and made like to your great example—whether you have prayed for strength, and used what power you had for the holy purpose of purifying your heart and its evil affections,—if so, then is there no condemnation to you, for you are in Christ Jesus, and walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Your best endeavours will be accepted if you be thus *in earnest* in your strife against your sinful and selfish affections and passions, and if you continually pray for the divine favour and assisting grace, your imperfections and frailties will never be mentioned unto you, but blotted out for the sake of him in whom you have believed. And while he knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are but dust, he has promised his forgiving mercy to those only who sincerely endeavour to walk in the steps of our Lord's most holy life, who have crucified the body of sin, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

In conclusion, I would again refer to the sub-

ject of our discourse, self-justification ; and as we find, that by those several excuses which I have named, no man can obtain forgiveness, much less be justified, it behoves us all to know the true way by which the real justification can be obtained, and that is by faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, for “ all that believe are justified from all things,” going to him burdened with our sins and wearied with our transgressions, pleading for mercy as those who having nothing to offer, look unto the righteousness of him who offered up himself as the propitiatiion for our sins. But how shall those go to Christ who feel not the burden of their sins as heavy and wearisome ? who are not hurt and oppressed, grieved, and humbled, and bowed down by it ? who have no desire to be relieved from it? The promise of rest is to the weary and heavily-laden ; if, like the prodigal, we come to the compassionate Saviour with penitent and contrite spirits, we shall receive that mercy which to the real penitent is never refused, and the very going to the Saviour for mercy implies the purpose of the repenting spirit to sin no more—no more wilfully to be disobedient to that gracious God who has made him a partaker of unmerited mercy and love,—mercy, without which knowledge is misery, hope is lost, and the prospect of a future life so delightful and glorious to the true Christian, would

be at best a doubtful and melancholy view, but now becomes a source of comfort, under the deepest worldly affliction, and of joy unspeakable and full of glory to the departing spirit.

SERMON XX.

JUDGE NOT.

LUKE vi. 37.

“ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged ; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.”

THIS is one of the many prohibitions respecting the vice of condemning or judging others, and is directed against slander of every kind, and unjust, uncalled-for censure. Love thy neighbour is enjoined or is implied in almost every page of holy writ, and who can love him, of whom he thinks contemptuously and speaks with reproach ? Nor is it the word of God alone, but every wise man in every civilized country has proclaimed the baseness of this vice ; nay, those we term unenlightened savages often speak of their brother savages with kindness or concern, and by their humanity, their tenderness, and mutual participation of each other’s fortune, they afford us an example of bro-

therly affection, and teach Christians how they may become men.

The branches of this vice are various; they consist of groundless conjectures, evil reports, and uncharitable suppositions—they essentially unite in speaking in such manner of another as tends to lessen his reputation or disturb his repose, without a motive to do him service, or a design to amend him, in those errors which are the foundation of such reports. And let no one who speaks to the prejudice of another conclude his intention good, without the severest examination; for it can but very seldom happen that any good will arise from it. People are not deterred from vice by example, but excited to it; and the more we encourage a disposition that delights in another's faults, the more we flatter and fondle our own. Happy, indeed, would it be if a man's vices were the only subjects of man's condemnation; but the censorious stop not here—they condemn his most indifferent peculiarities, nay, even his virtues; they deride his talents, they despise his person, they degrade his merit, they blast his reputation; it is their sport to run down his fortune; and to attack him in all his actions, forms only a part of their entertainment. If to speak without a motive of advantage either to ourselves or others; if to do that which all men condemn; if to do that which all men suffer by, be unreasonable, how unreasonable

is a disposition to slander ! it is the malignity of folly, it is the rancour of fools. What am I the better if another be bad ? What am I the worse if my neighbour be commended ? Does his error require my censure to add to it ? Does his good fortune ask my slander to make it less ? Will he amend because I rail ? No ! but he will reckon me his enemy, and never pay my reproof the compliment of his reformation.

But you may say that another's faults make your virtues conspicuous—they must be indeed little virtues that need such a medium ; we want no assistance to look at great objects, but if your merits are indeed very small, perhaps they may seem to some enlarged through your neighbour's infirmities ; but remember that every man of understanding will know this is not the natural way of looking at them ; but commonly the man that rails at another not only lays himself open to a retort, but puts people in mind of his own imperfections ; those who speak evil of the profane, the proud, and the extravagant, not to expose vice but to injure character, do they not remind us, in the very act, of their own hypocrisy, meanness, or avarice ? The enemy of vice does not rail at, but endeavours to *lessen* the *number* of the vicious. This vice, therefore, is contrary to the law of the Almighty, to the law of nature, to the light of reason, and the good of man ; it is, we find, un-

profitable, and we shall find it mean, malicious, and full of danger,—it is mean, for a great mind is above such little injuries. How cowardly is it to speak ill of the absent ! to wound those who cannot defend themselves ! to be at once accuser, witness, and judge of our neighbour's reputation. Is there not something in our own hearts that tells us we are ourselves guilty creatures when we rail at others ? Surely if we looked into ourselves and found all right in our own breasts, we should be in too pleasant a temper to find fault with others ; but if our vices vex and torment us, it is no wonder, though it is a great fault, that we try to reduce others to our own level.

Slander is not only a vice in itself, but it is the sure token of other vices, and a prudent man, to be imputed good, ought in discretion to be charitable in his remarks. A continual change of opinion, as well as an obstinate adherence to it, is a strong indication of a little mind, and this is almost always manifested in the slanderer. No actions, no words, no opinions, escape him ; he levels his censure at all mankind ; he discharges his spleen on every reputation ; the poor he reproaches with want of prudence, the rich he accuses with want of compassion, the prudent he upbraids with closeness of design, and he laughs at the compassionate for the weakness of their natures. How might a man reason with them who are so preju-

diced ? Ye are not satisfied with my religion, you call it hypocrisy ; yet if I be free you accuse my irreligion. When I appear cheerful you wonder at my thoughtlessness ; when I seem thoughtful, you see evil in the occasion. I am distressed, and ye say I deserve it ; I become easy, and ye suspect my principles have been sacrificed to my repose.

And here I must take notice of a fault which nowhere comes so properly as under the article meanness : which is that of pretended pity and sorrow for our neighbours' errors or misfortunes ; the severest things that can be said of us are said by those who pretend to pity, who are professedly concerned for our afflictions, aggrieved by our calamities, and full of gentle rebuke at our miscarriages. Insulting hypocrisy ! the little artifice of a narrow heart, a loose tongue, and a perverted disposition ; a bait to gain applause for good nature, while they are throwing out poison and playing with our ruin. It is malicious ; for let us look on a person, prosperous, easy in circumstances, and well with the world, of respectable character for those things which that world calls most reputable. And let us hear, for we often may hear them, with false pity or open triumph railing at the little errors and mistakes of their unfortunate neighbours, perhaps ruined, wretched, and full of affliction ;—is not this highly malicious ? Is anything so contrary to the character of Chris-

tianity, to that love and charity which should influence the heart of one who feels that he himself has much to be forgiven, and whose only hope of present peace and future happiness is through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ ? Is anything so conformable to the character of the devil ? He is an accuser of the brethren, the father of lies.

Again ; no person is so low and poor, but he may in some degree avenge himself if he be so disposed, as indeed we all are too much ; mankind are linked together in such a manner that the most obscure has it in his power to return the injury of the most conspicuous ; either by open violence, or secret wrong if he be a bad man—or by patient triumph and steady defiance if his poverty retains the courage of virtue. But if the person censured be powerful and above his accuser, the danger is much greater ; he will find a time to retort with severe interest, and repay every foolish word with a deed of retaliation ; he will alienate the friends of his slanderer, and stir up his enemies ; he will himself attack his credit, and find or feign a thousand flaws in his reputation. Nor is it, perhaps, uncommon to atone by absolute ruin for the injuries of inconsiderate scandal. If, then, our neighbour be in adversity, is it not an act of malignity to traduce his character ? If he be in prosperity, is it not a token of envy ? His good fortune hurts us, and we dare avenge

ourselves on his demerits. We cannot reach to his height, and we level him to our meanness ; there is a part of his character that is too bright for us, we shade it with his defects. Do not all these things speak our own depravity, the restless malice of the natural heart ? proving the truth of scripture, “ The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.” But this vice is likewise dangerous, for it exposes a man’s own faults, and puts the world in mind of his infirmities. Many people listen to tales of slander, and many love them, but few think well of the slanderer, and none on account of his information. In the flow of conversation, the tale of scandal is hurried round, and all seem to approve it, but I believe the private reflections which are made at home on these occasions injure the teller of an idle tale much more than the party abused. And suppose the accused to be both prudent and forgiving, this which so greatly aggravates the crime does but increase the danger to the accuser, for then the accuser has more friends about him, and they, seeing the malignity of the slander, will take that revenge which he himself will not take, and think it a point of honour and gratitude to heap vengeance on his enemies.

Having thus considered the nature of this vice of uncharitable censure, in opposition to the express command of God and of human reason—its

meanness, malignity, and danger—I shall now speak to those who have allowed themselves these unreasonable liberties of discourse ; and, secondly, to those who have suffered by it. And let me exhort all men who believe in the religion of Jesus Christ to weigh seriously the words he has left for our direction on this important subject : “ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged ; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned ; for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.” “ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye ? ” “ Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” St. Paul speaks of this vice in his epistle to Timothy : “ Put them in mind to speak evil of no man.” In his epistle to the Corinthians, “ Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come ;” and again, charity “ thinketh no evil.” St. James saith, “ Speak not evil one of another ;” “ who art thou that judgest another ? ” All which passages, and many others to the same import, enforce clearly that divine prohibition in my text—judge not.

Let us further reason on this matter. How are you certain the thing you report of another is true ? was it not told you ? and if so, may it not

be false ? There are not many things generally known that are truly known. Do we not see in public affairs how report contradicts report, and rumour displaces rumour ? much more is the uncertainty in private concerns. Many eyes are looking at national business, and it can hardly be concealed from all ; but few can see into the actions of individuals, and therefore there is greater probability of mistake ; yet you who will not believe the news of a battle, or a defeat, will give credit to your neighbour's misfortunes and misconduct upon the slightest information, upon the whispers of a foe ? But perhaps you have some reason for your censure, and *know* a part of what you advance : indeed, this is a most common case in every malevolent attack. You are sure of something, and this serves as a foundation for all your superstructure—because you know it cannot be contradicted. Moreover, allowing your veracity, you see the worst part of your neighbour's character—his shifts and sorrows, his repining and fretfulness, if in poverty, or his exultation in prosperity and on success. The virtues of his character lie hid beneath a veil, and where is that charitable hand that will lift it up, and that charitable eye that will look at the virtues beneath it ? But you will say, we *know* certainly the actions we condemn ; we have watched the conduct we disapprove ; we know the truth of

our reports, and, rest our own character on the veracity with which we speak of others. It may be so ; but if you know a man's actions, by what rule do you know his motives to them, his trials, his struggles, his temptations ? how much he suffered, how much he resisted, how reluctantly he yielded ? These things are in his own breast, only discovered, only discoverable by the all-searching eye of his God, who looks more mercifully upon him than you will do. What motives led an unhappy man to defraud his neighbour we cannot tell, but we all know that he can have none but malignant motives who *slanders* ; it neither feeds him if he hunger, nor satisfies him if he thirst, nor eases his conscience if his sins torment him. You will say, then is vice to escape ? Shall one whom the law cannot reach be free from all human punishment ? Shall he triumph in the iniquity we do not indulge in ? If, indeed, vice were a pleasure or a triumph, there were some propriety in these questions, but I trust it is neither to any of us. The man who commits a fault, in proportion to its magnitude certainly angers as he disobeys a just and righteous God ; he most probably wounds his own conscience ; he forfeits the esteem of good men, though he does not provoke their slander ; he falls unavoidably in his reputation, and becomes liable to the vengeance of

human laws in as many cases as he offends against them ; and should he escape these “ there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

Now if all these things are not sufficient to punish an offending fellow-creature, then let thy hard thoughts and harsh words add to his affliction and persecute him for his offence ; not, indeed, that slander is always thus cautious, to speak evil of those only who deserve it. I dare affirm you have all known, and I answer for myself that I have, tales raised without even the slightest foundation, and reports propagated without the smallest regard to truth. It is strange, but no less true, that there are people who delight in these things, who rather than not speak censoriously of their neighbours, will be at the pains to invent incidents and forge accusations. Great God ! how unlike thee are thy creatures ! we sin, and thou forgivest us ; we provoke thee—thou turnest and repentest thee of the evil ; we daily rebel against thee, and thou art our preserver, our helper, and our friend ; but we, without end, without reason, without fear, become each other’s foes of the bitterest kind ! and all such as are beyond the reach of personal injuries, we load with contempt, with disgrace, with shame. And that we may see the folly of this vice, let us reflect how often it happens that time clears up the character we have injured. Actions appear with other mo-

tives. New circumstances arise in our view ; the man is beheld in a different light, and the very things that were once the objects of our evil report, we have now the shame to look upon as worthy our praise and patterns for our imitation : so that in every view, whether we think of the nature or end, the cause or consequence, the sinfulness or punishment, of this uncharitable or censorious temper, we shall find it unworthy the Christian, the citizen, or the man—equally reprobated by God and reason, equally injurious to religion, to society, and to our peace.

To you who suffer under the slander of your neighbour's evil report, much more gentle, much more comfortable things may be addressed ; for consider, first, that if you are really guilty of the things laid to your charge, what an opportunity is given you to amend by the forcible instruction such reproaches give you. What a noble revenge do we take when we render our enemy's report ineffectual by our reformation ! How very little is the mind that rails, how very great the spirit that reforms ! But if you are innocent of the things the censorious lay to your charge, your case is different, “ for what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults ye shall take it patiently ? but if when ye do well and suffer for it ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.” And if you are spoken evil of for Christ's sake, your happiness is abundantly

greater. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. “ Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven ;” the clamour of your enemies is the shout of your triumph. Happy, indeed, is the good man under this visitation, if he do not suffer the world to mount above and overwhelm him ; then while the busy, the idle, the envious, and ill-natured, are prating their little tales of poorly-invented reproach, he retires and looks into his own bosom, and finds a good and quiet conscience with which he converses in comfort, and praying to his God he lies down in peace. Yet I well know the weakness of a dejected and humble spirit, under the trials of calamity and reproach.

I readily allow the difficulty of bearing up against slanderous tongues, intent to sharpen the edge of affliction ; and it is no easy thing to sit down with religious fortitude when we strive and struggle under poverty, and day and night labour in our minds and bodies to rid ourselves in vain. When all our expectations are lost, and all our hopes defeated, and all our pains repaid with disappointment—when we are sick in mind, and infirm in constitution, and dejected in spirit, and lost to hope—when we seem to wander through the world alone, no man regarding us, no man caring for us—when our enemies triumph over us,

and exult in their conquest—when our friends fall from us and cool in their affection—when they cease to pity and begin to blame, and at last turn against us—when the few that love us cannot assist us, perhaps want our assistance—when the many that hate us mock our misfortunes, perhaps bring them upon us—when all but religion is lost, and religion itself is shaken or overcast by despondency,—then, and in these circumstances, to hold fast your integrity, to trust in your God, to pity and forgive your accusers, and to rely on the mercies and means of an over-ruling providence, are the evidences of a truly christian temper, a noble and persevering spirit, and a soul acceptable and accepted of God, and sanctified by its sorrows; and for your comfort on earth let it be remembered that the affliction of this world, like this world's vanities, passeth away.

Often it happens that your day of mourning is quickly over; your sun breaks out, your character is redeemed, your troubles are forgotten, your enemies are silent, your friends return, and your former state is remembered no more, or remembered only to your credit and applause. And here is a new scene of trial; there is danger lest when your sorrows are forgotten, resentment should arise; but remember what creatures and whose we are; how that in many things we all offend, and in all things we fall short of perfec-

tion. Hence let brotherly love and christian charity be increased amongst us ; and whatever our station is and whatever our provocations may be, let us be humble, gentle, easy to be entreated, not rendering railing for railing, but contrarywise blessing, and so shall we be most sure that the blessing of God is with us, and that the arm of the Almighty will defend and protect us for ever.

SERMON XXI.

THE ALMOST CONVINCED AND THE ALMOST
CONVERTED.

ACTS xxvi. 28.

“ Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

WHETHER Agrippa was ever entirely persuaded to be what he almost wished to be, is, I believe, very uncertain ; he was not endowed with so much authority as some who were appointed governors by the Romans, but he had perhaps more wisdom and moderation than many ; at least thus far he was wise, that he listened attentively to the words of the apostle, but his words are now before us : “ Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” They are not many, but they are surely important, and it will not be unprofitable to us if we reflect seriously upon them, and consider

what it is, and to what it leads, when almost we are persuaded.

And here, perhaps, it may not be superfluous, if we stop to recollect the difference between the two expressions,—the almost being persuaded to be a Christian, and the being persuaded to be almost what a Christian should be. To be a Christian is to be what St. Paul was, excepting his inspiration ; and Agrippa's expression conveys that he was almost persuaded to be this; but there are great numbers with whom persuasion goes not so far; they are not, as I observed, almost persuaded to be Christians, but persuaded to be almost Christians,—that is, to be so far religious as it is convenient or agreeable. We will consider both these kinds of persuasion : and first, that of Agrippa, the being *almost* persuaded.

And here we have to remark that king Agrippa had studied the prophets and believed them. “ King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ?” said St. Paul ; “ I know that thou believest :” he was not therefore like Festus, contemptuous nor touched with momentary feeling on hearing of a judgment to come, as Felix was, but he was prepared by serious consideration and study of the Scriptures. And this is a great argument for the truth of our religion ; it makes a much greater progress with well-informed minds than with the ignorant. All the nations and people to whom

the apostles preached the gospel were not rude and ignorant, wild or uncultivated ; but among them were the most civilized and instructed in the arts, and by the wisdom which was then in the world ; many of them, as the Athenians, were a refined and learned people, always inquisitive after any new matter that was presented to them, and quite capable of investigation. Now when such people are converted, and embrace the religion proposed to them, it must be either for some immediate pleasure or profit, or because they are convinced of its truth. Profit or pleasure, as generally understood, there was not, but, on the contrary, the continual exercise of forbearance and self-denial ; then it follows, that their reason consented, their judgment went with the apostles, and they were convinced by facts and proofs that could not be resisted.

Illiterate and uninformed nations may be persuaded, but not in the same way, nor so much by the understanding, but gradually and in part ; and more especially when they perceive that their instructors are more wise, more enlightened than themselves, and from a country they admire and look up to, as flourishing, powerful, and happy. But this was not the reason why the people of old were converted by the apostles, who were comparatively poor, boasted of no worldly wisdom, and were strangers from a country of which they knew

little, and respected less. “What will this babbler say ?” was the first question of these learned men ; but they soon found that he whom they ridiculed had the words of sobriety, wisdom, and truth.

Agrippa, having studied the prophets, had a foundation that christian truth might be built upon ; and the more a mind is informed, the more it is fitted for the sacred doctrines and exalted views of the christian religion. Such minds, it is true, may be only almost persuaded ; but they are more likely to be entirely convinced than the uncultivated. I speak not here of moral fitness, for it is equally true of all men in their natural state, that they love darkness rather than light, but of due instruction, and, as we say, good education. It is necessary also to remember that I am speaking of the conversion of those who had not previously been acquainted with the religion proposed to them. Christianity is a religion *adapted* to the illiterate, the uninformed, and those of inferior capacities, who can feel its comforts and obey its precepts, as well as the learned and more instructed. But in this christian country the unlettered are brought up in the sacred truths, and taught to reverence the ordinances of our holy religion, what to believe, and how to live, as the disciples of our Lord.

This is a different thing from the conversion of him who is yet a stranger to the religion which is

proposed to his judgment, as well as his obedience ; and in this case the better and stronger his judgment is, the sooner he is persuaded that the doctrine is true. Thus it was with Agrippa, and thus with many who were converted by St. Paul ; and no question but Christianity receives an additional evidence from the conviction of such as Agrippa, and from the many converts among the nations of Rome and Greece, the most powerful and most learned of all people ; for surely it is a strong argument for the truth of our religion, that the wiser, the better informed, and the further advanced in all profitable arts and useful knowledge nations are, so much the more readily they admit the facts, and so much the more willingly they obey the moral precepts of the gospel. The nations amongst whom St. Paul and the other apostles laboured, were the most enlightened on the face of the earth ; they were more capable of inquiring into, and reasoning upon, all that was conveyed to them ; and in a few years there was no more acknowledged idolatry amongst them.

The stronger the mind is, and the more taught in every profitable study, so much the more readily will it assent to those divine truths and that holy doctrine which is indeed wisdom, and makes those who believe and obey it wise unto salvation ! But if such, with natural and acquired knowledge, and good understanding, be profligate,

cruel, uncharitable, or be under the dominion of any wicked passion that prevails over their better judgment—and this is too frequently to be seen among us—then they are certainly hard to be convinced, because they have that evil within their mind that opposes and forbids the entrance of religious truth to the heart ; and what the heart is unwilling to admit, the understanding will not readily agree to. A wicked man cannot become a sincere believer in the gospel of our Lord until he be first converted from the sins of his life.

But it may be said that Agrippa was *but almost* persuaded ; what he did, and how he proceeded, we are not informed. If he were wise and patient, and sincere in pursuing his inquiries, he no doubt became not almost, but altogether, a Christian ; but doubtless there are many who, like him, are almost persuaded, and whoever finds himself thus disposed, thus almost convinced, let him recollect that he has many proofs which Agrippa could not have, not only in the conversion of multitudes in every region from that time until the present, but also in the very existence and prevalence of that holy religion, which, had it not been true, had long since been entirely forgotten, or had only been recorded as an instance of unsuccessful imposture ; its truth preserved it.

Now be it allowed that a person is almost per-

suaded of the truth of the christian religion, what is he to do ? suspense is uneasy ; a state of doubt is that of disquiet. How should a man free himself from such uncertainty ? He is first to look diligently from whence the impediments to his entire belief proceed, whether the fault be not in himself. It may be that he will not enter into the conditions of Christianity, and then it is no wonder if he strive against conviction ; it is his pleasure, his passion, his inclination that argues, or at least that persuades against the sobriety and godliness that he must follow if he become a Christian ; he must make no agreement between temptation and conviction, he must have no something to do first, if he feels it a duty to follow his Redeemer. But if an almost persuaded person be firm and sincere, willing to cast off every sinful indulgence, and to make no compromise with his conscience ; if he will read the Scriptures with seriousness and respect, if he will lead a christian life, and ask for wisdom and light from the Father of spirits, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, then there will remain no other doubt or difficulty than must cleave to all who are engaged in the christian warfare, and exposed to the assaults and temptations of the evil one ; he will have faith sufficient to venture all things upon it, to give up all rather than part with it. And he who would stake his life for his soul's happiness in a state to

come, has undoubtedly that faith that overcomes the world ; and he will eventually obtain that comfortable assurance which is never denied to any who follow their Lord fully.

We will now advert to that other view of this subject which I have already stated, when speaking of the distinction between the being almost persuaded to be a Christian, and the being persuaded to be almost a Christian. Agrippa, we have seen, is an example of the first view ; and we shall find in the rich young man who left our Lord in sorrow to be an instance of the other. He would have done much to inherit eternal life, but he would not do all ; the commandments, he said, he had kept from his youth, but he had not learned how to part with a favourite indulgence. His possessions were clogs upon his soul, and his divine Teacher saw this : “ Go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor,” “ and come and follow me.” It was the young man’s trial ; he heard, and perhaps he considered, but he went away sorrowful, for he was very rich. This is a much more common case than the former ; where there is one kept from religion because his judgment is not fully convinced, there are many who are not Christians indeed, because there is something which that requires, and which they will not give up ; and strange expedients have some recourse to, when their duty requires something, and their

heart or their passions refuse it. What did Ananias and Sapphira his wife ? They judged it to be a duty to make some charitable contribution, and to lay their purposed alms at the apostles' feet ; but while this call operated upon their minds, there was the love of money pleading at the heart. No man required the sacrifice of their possessions ; it was all of free will, and these unhappy persons appear as if they were resolved to be doubly gratified ; they would first have praise from the apostles and brethren for their bountiful supply, and then they would indulge the secret pleasure of the reflection, that they had yet a store, and were not reduced, like those whom they relieved, to a state of poverty ; they would openly have the credit of that sacrifice which they were conscious they had not made. It is true, this is a particular instance of the *almost* Christian ; but how many are there whom one or more favourite vices or indulgences separate from the true and real profession of the christian faith ! they know, they feel that they are not among the *true* disciples, and yet they cannot persuade themselves to remove the impediment.

Our Lord told the Jewish ruler, Nicodemus, that he must be born again, he must be born of the Spirit, that is, he must have new and pure motives for his actions. There is no mystery in what is thus required of the believer in Christ : his heart must be

changed ; he must live as one for whom Christ died, and who has such faith that he also dies to sin, and henceforth lives as the disciple of our Lord, who looks for eternal life, and obeys the precepts of his Redeemer from his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a willing and devoted spirit. The almost Christian cannot act from pure faith and sincere obedience ; he has always in reserve something that he loves, or some passion that he gratifies, some pleasure that he indulges in, or some object to which he sacrifices at times his duty. The man almost persuaded to be a Christian, may be fully persuaded if he takes the means, that is, if he studies the Scriptures, and walks humbly with his God, praying for divine light, and devoting himself to the truth ; but the almost Christian has another task, he has to part with whatsoever there may be between his spirit and the sincere and pure spirit of gospel truth. One of these only wants to know what the truth is, that he may choose it and obey ; but the other already believes in the authority of what is required of him, but is unwilling to give up all to the profession which he appears to approve and follow. As the former seeks only truth, he generally finds it ; but the latter, who seeks to be religious in a certain degree, and yet to gratify his own wishes, and to indulge himself in some propensity, must either make the sacrifice of his own

pleasure, or he will fall away, like water that runneth apace, into neglect of religious duties, and either take the miserable refuge of unbelief, or continue to sin against conviction. This almost Christian defends himself by the example of numbers around him ; he is but one of a multitude ; he is more correct, and leads a more regular and religious life than others whom he observes living in repute and without any reproach for their want of religion ; he is therefore reconciled to himself, and if the question should occur to him whether he is walking in the broad or the narrow way, he is content with knowing that it is the same way in which many are going with him, and who are, so far as he can see, very religious and praiseworthy persons. I need not inform you that this is not the Christian's way of self-examination ; he never compares himself with others, but with the christian pattern. Has he the true faith in Christ his Redeemer ? Does he study the will of his Lord, and lead a life of purity, righteousness, and peace ? Is there anything that comes between him and that quiet conscience which is his great comfort, and which reconciles him to all the sorrows and afflictions of this life ?

Such are the questions which he will ask himself, and to these he will have a direct and satisfactory reply. He will not be almost a Christian, for he is fully persuaded of the truth of his reli-

gion, and he will make no compromise with whatsoever opposes it. Let him then who is almost persuaded to be a Christian, be assured that the way to be freed from the anxiety of doubt is to study with the most serious attention the Scriptures themselves, and more especially the gospel of our Lord and Redeemer, and this with earnest prayer to the Father of lights, who giveth wisdom to them who ask it, will not fail to establish his mind in the truth that he so earnestly inquireth after, and he will have joy in the fulness and security of his faith. But to him who is almost the Christian, and who places something that he loves or delights in, between his hope of eternal life as promised in the gospel of his Redeemer, to him it is, above all things, necessary that he disengage his soul from his clog and incumbrance from the sin that so easily besets him. His Lord has said, Whoso loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, cannot be my disciple. And we may therefore be assured, that unless we are willing to take religion as we find it in the gospel, in the exercise of faith and sincere repentance, a devoted heart and a single eye, our labour is lost, and our hope is vain. Great is the mistake of that man who endeavours to satisfy his mind and soothe his conscience by being almost a Christian.

Again, I say, let those who are almost persuaded pray to their God for light, and his gra-

cious assistance in the study of his word and truth will shine upon and illuminate their minds, and let the almost Christian know assuredly that his only way to peace of conscience and acceptance with his Lord and Redeemer is to fight the good fight against the power that seduces him, to deny his passions whatsoever they unlawfully demand of indulgence, and to run with patience the race that is set before him, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

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